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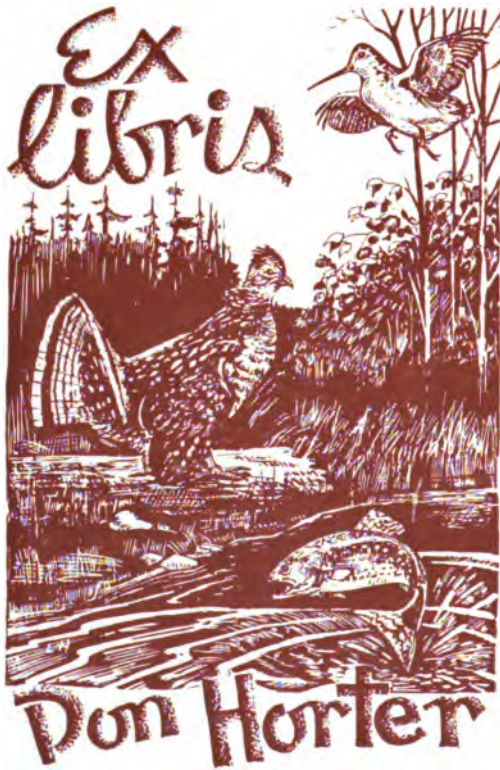
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A RIVER  
OF NORWAY



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Sir William Gentile  
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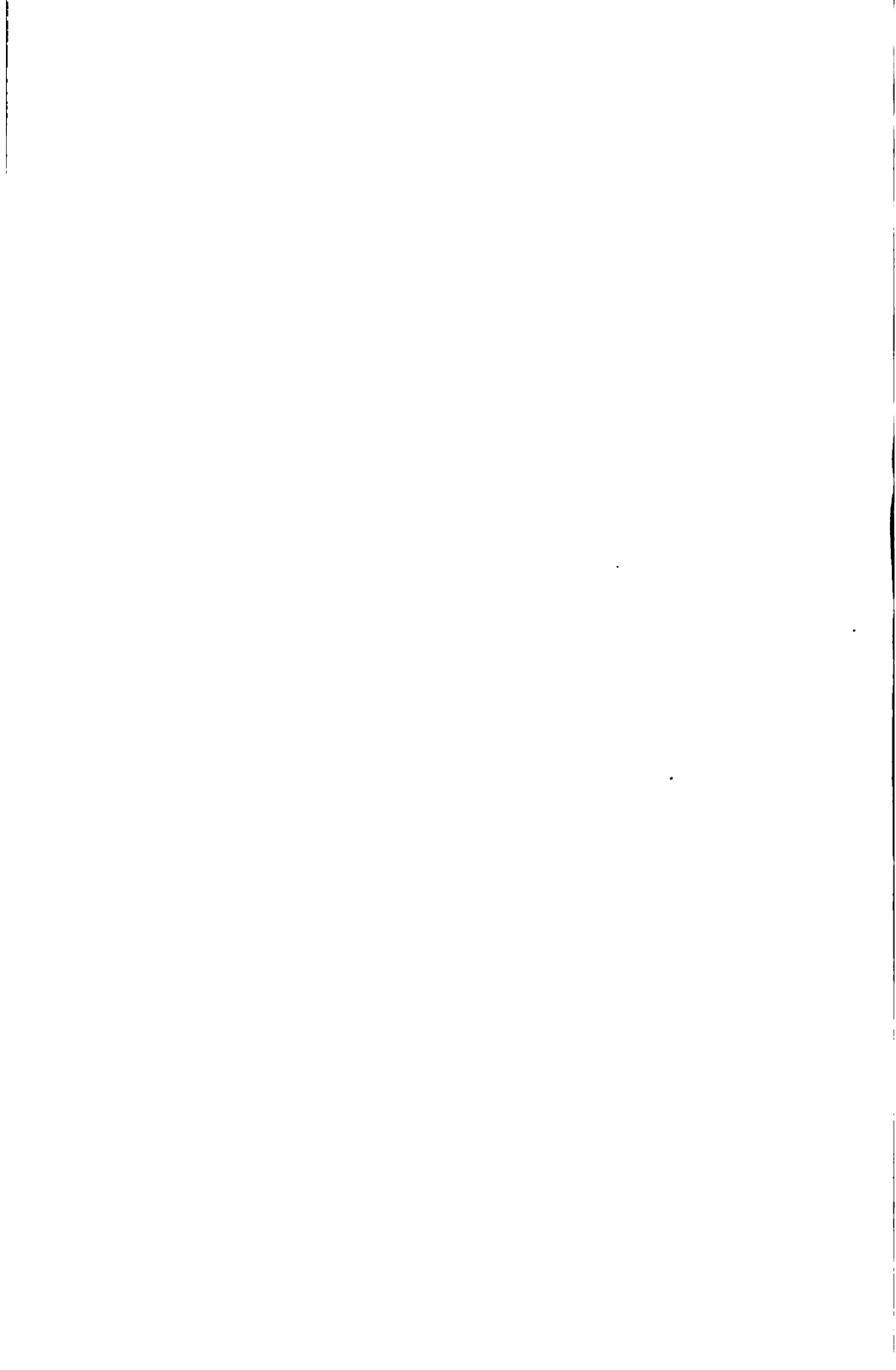




















Walter L. Goffe, Ph. D.

*The River's Mouth.*

# A RIVER OF NORWAY

BEING

## THE NOTES AND REFLECTIONS OF AN ANGLER

BY

CHARLES THOMAS-STANFORD

*WITH 10 PHOTOGRAVURE PLATES AND A COLOURED PLAN*

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

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S# 627

T6

*TO MY WIFE*



## PREFACE

NORWAY has yet to find its Scrope or Stoddart. The late Mr. Bromley Davenport indeed held us entranced with his tale of sport on fjeld and river; Mr. Abel Chapman has given us a masterly survey of its wild life by land and water; as a rule, however, the most successful sportsmen have been content to keep their good fortune to themselves. But the conditions of sport have changed, and the day of seclusion and reticence is past. The exploitation of salmon rivers as a business, and the free advertisement of their merits, have made the names of the Laerdal, the Sundal, the Orkla and many another river household words among anglers.

*Nota magis nulli domus est sua, quam mihi lucus  
Martis, et Aeoliis vicinum rupibus antrum  
Vulcani.*

That this slight contribution to Norwegian angling literature will interest the friends who have fished with me, and those others

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who have followed our doings from afar, I may reasonably hope. That it will prove of equal interest to a wider circle I have but a modest expectation.

The illustrations are from photographs by my wife. To my friend, Mr. C. S. Peach, I am indebted for the excellent plan of the Ladder.

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# A RIVER OF NORWAY

## CHAPTER I

### THE RIVER GAULA

“Child of the bright and stainless snow.”

—STUART, *Lays of the Deer Forest.*

IT rises among the western outposts of the biggest snow-field in Europe, and runs a course of perhaps fifty miles to the head of the fjord. It drains an area of about 250 square miles, and like most rivers of Western Norway, is almost wholly dependent for its head of water on the summer melting of the winter's snows. Midway in its career it forms two great lakes, respectively ten and fifteen miles long, which serve the double purpose of equalising its flow, and of raising the temperature of the water through the exposure of a large surface to the air. Its lower course is broken by several falls or rapids, one of which, some twelve miles from the tidal water, finally bars the upward run of salmon. The lowest fall, fifty feet high, is

## 2 A RIVER OF NORWAY

situate a third of a mile from the mouth of the river. Salmon were unable to ascend it until thirty years ago, when a fish-pass or ladder was constructed which gave them access to the upper waters. The water below this fall is affected by the tide, but in summer, at all events, the force of the stream is always sufficient to maintain a downward current, though the level is constantly altering as the tide rises and falls. The extreme rise of the tide at the foot of the fall is, at spring tides, about five feet.

The fjord, or sea-loch, into the head of which the river runs is about twenty miles long. It is, as usual, guarded at its entrance by a number of small islands, the total distance from the river's mouth to the open sea being perhaps twenty-five miles.

The country which the river drains is composed of a hard rock, with very little soil. This fact, combined with the filtering process it undergoes in the great lakes, causes the water almost always, even in the highest floods, to be of a gin-like transparency; a result which from an angler's point of view has its drawbacks as well as its advantages.

As a salmon river it is not in the first class. Its fish, if fairly numerous, are not large; the conformation of the bed of the river renders a good deal of the water comparatively useless for angling purposes; and the numerous falls, though they have been skilfully circumvented by fish-passes, cause the fishing above the tidal water to be precarious and uncertain. In the best of recent seasons it has yielded to two rods in June and July 150 salmon and as many grilse. The heaviest fish we have killed scaled 82 lb. The average weight of salmon is  $18\frac{1}{4}$  lb., of grilse  $3\frac{1}{2}$  lb. These modest figures, though they do not compete with the bags made on some Norwegian waters, will nevertheless betoken to the discerning eye a sufficiency of the joys and the disappointments, the tremors and the triumphs, which go to make up "sport." In two respects we have cause for congratulation. The fish when they will take anything, will take the fly. They have not yet been debauched by the constant use of prawns, minnows, spoons, and such unhappy engines, which as we read with horror have ruined finer streams.

Further, it is by *casting*, and not by *harling*

#### 4      A RIVER OF NORWAY

the fly, that we kill our fish. In many of the great Norwegian rivers, and especially in those of the far North, casting is out of the question. In those mighty waters you may fish a pool all day, and never succeed in showing the fly to a fish. And so the method is adopted of rowing a boat backwards and forwards across the pool, each time a little lower down, with the fly or bait hanging behind the boat, until the whole of the water is covered. There is skill in doing this properly, but it is the boatman's, not the angler's. His function is confined to beguiling the time with a book, or his thoughts, until a fish strikes. And so, though he plays the fish when hooked, he misses what some regard as the supremest moment in the whole range of sport—the rise of a good fish to a well-thrown and well-worked fly. To many men of an active disposition such a procedure for any length of time is intolerable.

As early in the morning of June 1, 1908, we steam up the fjord on the little steamer which we have chartered for the journey of a hundred miles from Bergen, to fish the river for the sixth year in succession, we anxiously scan the higher hills. Extraordinarily heavy snows are said to

have fallen during the past winter. Such reports are disseminated by persons who have a pecuniary interest in the prospects of the angling season, and it is always possible that they may have taken a rose-coloured view. But on this occasion it is evident they have not erred. As we leave the region of the outer fjords with their low bare islands, and enter a land of loftier hills and birch-girt cliffs, we find all the higher summits still snow-clad; and on the northern slopes, which the sun has yet hardly reached, there are great masses of snow extending far down among the trees. There has been a spell of hot weather for the last week; yesterday in Bergen the heat was that of London in the dog-days; and all the little becks and rills are coming down in flood. It is evident that we shall have to deal with a big river. Other things being equal, a bigger river as a rule means better sport. So we look forward to a good year, and begin to talk of fish in terms of thousands of pounds. It is the habit of mankind

“To swallow gudgeons ere they’re caught,  
And count the chickens ere they’re hatched.”

As we round the last headland and approach



the river's mouth, the great fall comes into view—white, splendid, translucent—a tumbling mass of foaming water; showing that the river is, as we expected, in very high flood. To the right lies the little group of dwellings composing the hamlet of Osen, conspicuous among them our house with its orchard and garden, the former not yet in bloom.

We learn on landing that in spite of the lateness of Spring—in some years the orchard is in full bloom on June 1st—salmon began running very early this year. A party of Norwegians from Bergen usually fish here in May, their enterprise being seldom rewarded with many fish. This year they are said to have killed fifteen; one a 30-pounder, as early as May 6th. It is possible that in many Norwegian rivers which are not (officially) fished until early in June, fish run much sooner than is commonly supposed by the English lessees. But there can be no doubt that for this district this river is very early. The cause is to be found perhaps not only in its comparative proximity to the open sea, the fish having to make a shorter fjord journey than to most rivers of its size, but in the fact that the water

is warmed in the great lakes already mentioned. I find to-day that the temperature of the water is  $46.5^{\circ}$  Fahrenheit, the coldest I have registered. It is usually from  $48^{\circ}$  to  $50^{\circ}$  on the 1st of June.

The tidal water below the great Fos will occupy our entire attention for at least three weeks, possibly for longer. The date at which any large number of fish ascend to the upper waters is very variable, and though stray fish have been observed in the ladder early in June, it is usually the end of the month, and sometimes it is July, before there is any great run. This fishing in the tideway, though it has been termed by a caviller "sea fishing," has many points of interest and attraction. The fish killed are nearly all fresh-run, they take the fly well and freely, and they fight with a vigour and dash which I have not found paralleled elsewhere. "They make themselves very big for their size," it has been said. The water consists of three pools, two being side by side and the third below. As the river comes over the Fos, it divides into two streams. The two pools below are separated by a rocky island, covered at high water, but under ordinary con-

ditions appearing at about half tide. The greater bulk of the river is on the right bank, forming a magnificent pool called "Lervik," from its being part of the property of that name. The left stream makes what we know as "Ladder Pool," because the entrance to the artificial ladder is immediately above it at the side of the Fos. Lervik is fished chiefly from a boat, the water inshore being not very suitable for wading. The outside of Ladder Pool is also fished from a boat, but the greater portion of it can be reached from the shore or wading, and it is then known to us as "The Bank." The two pools join at a distance of about two hundred yards from the Fos, forming a deep hole in which fish may lie, but are very seldom killed. At this point on the left bank is a little group of warehouses, with a quay, to which come ancient vessels of almost prehistoric lines, to load cargoes of firewood and herring barrels for the Bergen market. Below this is a long stretch of smoothly running water in which the stream is almost obliterated at high tide. This we call "The Lower Stream" when fished from a boat on the right side, and "The Lower Bank" if

the angler wades from the left shore, as is possible.

Some years ago, before our tenancy commenced, an article on this river appeared in an English newspaper. The writer, among other inaccuracies, stated that the tidal water was so salt as to rot a gut cast, and that it was necessary to use wire. Herr Landmark, the Chief Fishery Inspector of Norway, was here a year or two ago, and he told me that he had frequently taken samples of the water at different depths, and at different states of the tide, from the neighbourhood of the quay before mentioned, and that he had found no trace of salt. His object was to ascertain whether salmon could spawn in this water, to which before the construction of the ladder they were confined; a small quantity of salt being fatal to the ova. As regards the statement about gut, I am not aware whether salt water rots it or not, but I have used the same cast for two consecutive seasons in this water, and killed several hundredweight of fish with it, and it has exhibited no sign of rottenness.

Before our first visit, having little experience

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of fishing in tidal water, I sought counsel of certain ancient anglers. One said, "You will catch them about the half flood; you will find the ebb is no good." Another said, "You will find the flood is no good; you will catch them about the half ebb." Happily both were wrong and both right. Fish take with perfect impartiality whether the tide is flowing or ebbing. Indeed, they have been killed at all states of the tide, including the two extremes, high and low water. But the hour or two on each side of the half tide is the accepted time; and perhaps on the whole the ebb is to be preferred, as one can continue fishing the pools again and again as long as fish take, whereas the water tends to become too heavy an hour or so after the half flood. At low water, unless the river is very big, the pools become too small to hold many fish; and it is a never solved problem what becomes of them. Usually I believe the majority run for the deep holes immediately under the Fos, from which as the tide rises they drop back to the pools again. But when the Fos is very heavy, or the water exceptionally cold, there can be little doubt that they drop back to the Lower Stream

or even to the fjord. At such a time the Lower Stream fishes well.

There are of course four periods in the twenty-four hours when the water is at half-tide, and most suitable for fishing. There have been occasions when all these four half-tides have been fished, but usually we find three fishings in the twenty-four hours quite as much as we want, the tide between 3 A.M. and 9 A.M. being omitted.

Under ordinary conditions Lervik Pool is far the best. Indeed, it would perhaps be difficult to find a piece of water of its size affording such continuous and consistent sport. It is here that our heaviest fish are killed, and though the other pools may have their turn for a day or two, it is always easily first in the season's records.

As only a portion of the tail can be satisfactorily fished wading, it is almost invariably fished from a boat. To enable the angler to reach the best water, the boat must be rowed in a strong stream, which is a severe trial to the boatman. I have often thought that a punt held by two men with poles, such as is used on the Shannon, would answer extremely well, but

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it is hopeless to try to teach the Norwegians such a novel practice, and to import Irishmen might bring discord into this peaceful valley. Not only has the boatman to struggle with the stream, but he must avoid the backwater ; once sucked into the raging white water below the Fos, the boat and its occupants would be no more seen. Of boatmen we have two, of different generations and types. Lars, the elder, is a very old man, considerably over eighty years of age. He lives in a little hut by the Lower Stream, and has acted as fisherman on this water for forty years. How he contrives to hold a boat in Lervik stream is a marvel ; probably it is more by skill than by strength, as he knows and takes advantage of every little eddy and backwash. He is a cheerful old man, fond of his jest, but if sport is adverse quickly yielding to the pessimism of age. If you don't hook a fish in the first ten minutes he is inclined to think it is no good going on. Last year he was obviously beginning to fail, and it is no surprise, and in some ways a relief, to find on arriving this year that he has decided to retire. He has finished game ; he tried to row for a Norwegian who was fishing here in

May, but had to give up through sheer inability. He does not appear to have had any medical attendance, and probably old age is his chief complaint. He can stroll about on the banks, and will no doubt beguile his leisure by criticising freely the performances of his successors.

Our other man, Anders, is not much more than half Lars' age. He is a typical example of the Norwegian peasant, brusque in manner, resourceful in difficulty, untiring when he sees the smallest chance of success. He knew little of fishing, other than harling a minnow, when I first engaged him; but he rapidly mastered our methods, and with his assistance I have created pools, built piers to fish from, cut down obnoxious trees, and otherwise improved the angling of the upper waters. His own property of Furenaes lies a couple of miles up the valley, above the pool of "Second Fos," hereafter to be described; and, like most of these peasant proprietors, he can turn his hand to almost anything; he could probably build one a house, or a boat, or a pair of boots—all moderately well.

As a substitute for Lars, he engages for us



## 14      A RIVER OF NORWAY

the services of another Anders, Anders Osen ; a colourless individual of no special merits, but with some slight experience of angling. We suspect the original Anders of unwillingness that any one of striking ability should stand too near the throne.





W. A. Z. 1880. 10. 16.

*The Lower Stream.*

## CHAPTER II

### SALMON

"The salmon, monarch of the tide."

SCHOLLETT, *Leven Water*.

THE Norwegian Spring is characterised by an extraordinary exuberance of vitality. One week it is winter, the next all nature springs to life. It may almost be compared with the bursting forth of vegetation on the South African veldt when the first Spring rains come, and in a night the burnt-up plains are covered with a mantle of green grass. Here, contrasting with the dazzling whiteness of the snow-clad hills, and of the foaming torrents which descend from them, the valley floor is rich in colour. In the hayfields the sorrel is reddening, rivaling in brightness its neighbour the Ragged Robin; while every sandy slope is purple with wild pansies. We are spared the pest of rivers farther north, where with the return of Spring the mosquito rises in clouds to vex the fisherman. From another plague we are also happily



*The Book of the*

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## 16      A RIVER OF NORWAY

free. Our scenery is, to our eyes at least, passing fair; but it is not of the sensational order which attracts the tourist and the hotel-keeper; and our excellent roads lead to nowhere in particular. So we are secure from the contemplation of that "unlovely exhibition of high spirits" which too often marks the tripper, and sometimes makes the quiet Englishman blush for his race in Bergen and on the tourist routes. No doubt such visitors bring money into the country, but it is impossible not to sympathise with educated Norwegians who deplore that the most beautiful spots in the land are vulgarised.

But to our Salmon. It is now, early in June, that fish really begin to run in any number, As we have seen, a few come in May, but they are only the scouts of the great army. On the whole, perhaps, the fish that run now are the bigger ones, but there is no very marked difference in this respect. At this time our sport is often very good, but it is very uncertain. It is quite possible to see no fish one day and to kill half-a-dozen the next. So I remember it happened two years ago. We had a blank day, an unusual mis-

fortune, on June the 6th. There seemed to be no salmon in the pools, and the only fish we saw was one in the ladder, a very early date for him to be there. On the 7th we fished the flood-tide in the morning and the ebb in the afternoon with similar lack of sport. Our men fell back on their time-honoured excuse—a north wind. But with the night flood came a run of fish, and the north wind was forgotten. We began at 11 P.M., it being my turn to fish Lervik, while my companion D. waded from The Bank. I mounted a Silver Wilkinson, a very conspicuous fly by reason of the Jungle Cock in its wings. At the second or third cast a fish jumped, or seemed to jump, over my line; so at any rate there was a fish in the pool. A few casts more and I was fast in a fish, a small salmon of 12 lb., which was soon upon the bank. Back again to the head of the pool, where in a minute or two another fish takes the fly. A bigger one this, and a lively fellow too. Down he goes, and across the broad tail of the pool, jumping two or three times like a great sea-trout. There is an ancient superstition handed down from one angler to another, and copied



(like many another fallacy) from old books into new, that when a fish jumps, the point of the rod must be smartly lowered and the line in consequence dropped loose on the water, in order that (as is supposed) there may be no sudden jerk or strain when the fish re-enters the river. This practice may be all very well in a lake, or in still pools, but in swift running streams it is a fatal error. The stream at once catches the slack line and forms a bag or belly of it, and when the strain comes, it is against the dead pull of the water. On the other hand, if the rod is held well up, as it almost always should be in playing a fish, its natural pliancy will prevent any sudden jerk on the fish's return to the water, and there will probably be a restoration of the *status quo ante*. Well, at any rate, a fish that jumps soon "breaks his heart or the hold," and it does not take many minutes to bring this one to bank. And a fine fellow he is, scaling fully 20 lb., sleek and shining, and sprinkled with sea-lice. Meantime on The Bank D. has hooked a 17-pounder, and disdaining the assistance of the gaff has dragged it high and dry on to the shore. This is

a favourite practice of D.'s; he once beached a 80-pounder on a Scotch river, and the habit has become inveterate. It certainly has its attractions; the angler owes nothing to extraneous aid; the victory is his and his alone—

“With yielding hand,  
That feels him still, yet to his furious course  
Gives way, you, now retiring, following now  
Across the stream, exhaust his idle rage,  
Till, floating broad upon his breathless side,  
And to his fate abandoned, to the shore  
You gaily drag your unresisting prize.”<sup>1</sup>

Again I return to the head of Lervik, and again the Wilkinson proves its attractiveness. But this time I am not to have it all my own way. The fish, a bigger one than either I have killed, takes down the pool, turns sharply into the slack water on the other side and then runs for the Fos. If he gets to the top of the island which I have mentioned as lying between the two pools, he will turn past it into a deep hole between it and the fall, and will probably cut my line against the jagged rocks at the corner. This is what happens. His sharp turn from the stream into the slack

<sup>1</sup> James Thomson, “The Seasons”—Spring.

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water, has put a bit of a belly into my line, and I am unable to get a steady pull at him until too late. As he passes the fatal rock, my line comes back to me minus the excellent Wilkinson and a yard of gut. But we learn by suffering, and the next big fish that shows any tendency to run up into that maelstrom, will find that he is being held very tight indeed. As a rule the fish that endeavour to make for the deep holes under the Fos are fish that have been there already; the absolutely fresh-run fish show, on the other hand, an inclination to run back to the fjord which they have just quitted. It is now between twelve and one, the darkest hour of the night, if it can be called dark when one can see to tie a fly on. So I put up a big Black Doctor, which as a night fly in clear weather I have found unequalled. Half-way down the pool I am into another, which makes a magnificent head-and-tail rise as he takes the fly. This, to my mind, is the supreme moment of angling; to see a big fish rise over, and come down upon the fly, and after a moment of intense suspense, during which one must restrain the inborn longing

to strike, to feel that he is hooked. And well-hooked he usually is under the circumstances. For a second or two the fish does nothing, as is commonly the way of big fish. Then, with an irresistible rush, he goes down and across the pool, taking fifty yards from my reel as though there were no check to it. As I scramble ashore from the boat, the backing of my line feels uncomfortably thin. Back he comes at me almost as quickly as he went away, then down again into the deep water. A terrible jiggering ensues, and my knees knock together in excitement and terror that he will escape. And so the fight goes on. When at length his strength is spent and he is towed into the quiet water under the bank, poor old Lars can hardly see in the treacherous light to put the gaff into him; but the habit of years comes to his assistance, and the deed is successfully done. A fine, fresh-run 26-pounder he is. Such fish are, I believe, for strength and courage the perfection of salmon-kind.

The tide is now too high to continue, and we cross over to The Bank, in time to see D. land a fish of 19 lb.

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Many such "Days and Nights of Salmon Fishing" live in the memory. It is strange how occasionally fish *will* have the fly, regardless of their brethren having been hooked and escaped, or been hooked and killed, before their eyes. On a June night in the great fishing season of 1900, I stood beside C., as he fished from The Bank, and for a time a fish rose every cast he made. Some merely gave a "pull," others were hooked and lost, others were played and killed; but still as the fly came round a fish came at it. It was at 4 A.M. and the sun was coming over the hill, and the ebb-tide had fallen almost to low water. The fish were lying in only three or four feet of water, and for some unknown reason were madly on the take. C. was dropping from fatigue, and could hardly hold his rod up to play the last, an 18-pounder, which ran wildly for the Fos. But such occasions, to be marked with a white stone, are few and far between.

In the long run, our best sport has been had at night. Major Traherne's theory that fish do not take well in the small hours of the morning does not hold good here. But fish will frequently take in the daytime, especially before

noon, and in the brightest sun. A small Silver Grey or Silver Doctor is then the most killing fly. Our record fish was killed on a Silver Grey on a bright day, about noon. On a dark day we have found the Jock Scot invincible. The worst time undoubtedly is late in the afternoon, when the sun is shining directly up the river, but I have known fish take even then.

The angler's ambition is ever to kill a really big fish, but it is not always the biggest fish that fight most pluckily for their lives. I met with an instance of this a few years ago when fishing the Sundal River. It was clearing after a spate; the previous day it had been too big and too dirty for sport. By the side of a strong running stream I hooked a fish, but until he was on the shore I had no suspicion of his size. He was extremely sluggish, and seemed averse to going out into the stream, and never, I think, took out five yards of line. Within six minutes of my hooking him he drifted close to the bank, when my gillie put the gaff into him and dragged him ashore. Then we saw to our surprise and delight that he was a great fat cock fish; and they were increased when we found that he actually scaled 42 lb. I was

fishing with single gut and a medium sized Jock Scot, and with the river as it was the odds were on the fish, if he had only played the game. It is possible that he had been travelling and was tired. I have met with similar instances of dull fish in our upper waters here; but in the tidal water we are not troubled with such sluggards, and I do not remember to have killed a fish in it which did not make a creditable fight.

Our anticipations of a good year, based on the big river and the great reserve of snow, seem, as June is passing away, hardly likely to be realised. The conditions are quite abnormal. The river is unusually high, and the water unusually cold. Fish run into Lervik and Ladder Pools, but they do not seem to lie there. Nor do I think that they frequent the great holes under the Fos, and there is no run of fish up the ladder. Some are lying in the Lower Stream, and others I believe return with the ebb-tide to the fjord, whence they will doubtless run up again when the conditions alter. There do not seem to be many fish, certainly far fewer are to be seen jumping than usual. At such times sport is uncertain and the element of luck plays

a great part. In normal times one rod will probably have very much the same sport as the other, but when fish are few or coy, it is all a matter of fortune. So it was one day soon after our arrival. We began at 8 A.M. on the ebb-tide. C., usually a most successful angler, tried an "Eagle" in the still water from the Lower Bank. It was an old fly, and the gut loop must have been rotten, for as a fish took it, it broke. Fortune does not readily forgive such a waste of opportunity, and not another rise did poor C. get the whole day. For me, it was a day of days. On the morning ebb I killed three fish in Lervik, 18, 12, and 22 lb.; on the afternoon flood, wading from the Lower Bank, three, of 15, 18, and 12 lb., and when I went out again to fish Lervik on the evening ebb, by all the rules the best chance of the twenty-four hours, it looked as though I might break all records. But it was not to be. Lervik was drawn blank, and I was beginning to despair when I got a 16-pounder in a backwater at the head of the Lower Stream, where we very seldom cast a fly. So I had seven fish, weighing 108 lb., and the strangest and luckiest part of it was, that I did not, to



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my knowledge, rise another. It is not often thus.

But who may say with any confidence that he has not risen a fish? Beneath that rippling surface which the eye cannot penetrate, things happen you have no idea of. Fish from a high rock over a smoothly running pool, and you may see salmon after salmon come up to within a few inches of the fly, and turn down again without showing any sign on the surface. And on what insufficient grounds do we often assert that there isn't a fish in the pool! There is a story that the lessee of a certain river in this district complained to the owner that he had not seen a fish for days, and that he was sure there was not one in the whole water. "We will net the best pool, and see," said the owner. They did so, and took out thirty-six salmon. "You see there are plenty of fish," said the Norwegian. "There were," replied the Englishman, "but what is the good of my fishing now?" "Oh! there are plenty more; shall we try again?" suggested the owner. And this time the haul was twenty-three fish. There is a moral in this story.

The salmon is a river fish; he is born in

the river, in the river he spends his early youth, he procreates his young, and sometimes he dies. The food obtainable in the river is quite insufficient to support him, and therefore he goes to the sea for his living, as some of our East Coast people go to the Dogger Bank. When from the abundant spoil of the sea he has stored up sufficient nutriment to support him for a while in the foodless river, he returns thither ; and during this visit to his birthplace frequently performs the functions ordained for the reproduction of his kind. That this process is not his main, or sole, object in revisiting his home seems clear from his migration frequently taking place many months before the season of spawning.

The return of the salmon from the sea to the river is admirably described in some lines by Mr. Stephen Gwynn :—

“ As the shining salmon, homeless in the sea-depths,  
Hears the river call him, scents out the land,  
Leaps and rejoices in the meeting of the waters,  
Breasts weir and torrent, nests him in the sand ;  
Lives there and loves ; yet with the year's returning  
Rusting in his river, pines for the sea,  
Sweeps back again to the ripple of the tideway,  
Roamer of the waters, vagabond and free.”

The question whether salmon feed in fresh water, which has excited much acrimonious controversy, turns on the definition of the word "feed." Certainly adult salmon do not eat enough food in rivers to support life, because it is not there; and the race of salmon has accordingly learnt to find its sustenance elsewhere. But that they more or less eagerly take into their mouths such edible morsels as come in their way is a fact on which the angler's practice is based. A Scottish College of Physicians has somewhat hastily assumed that salmon do not feed in fresh water, because their stomachs after death are collapsed and shrunken; but a plea that his digestive organs were out of order would seem a weak defence for a salmon charged with taking a prawn into his mouth with intent to devour it.

I believe the actual fact to be this, and I know many anglers will support my view, that fresh-run fish, not yet thinking of spawning, and kelts, which have completed the process, will feed greedily on such food as they can find; but that fish, when preparing for the spawning season, do undergo a physiological change which renders them unable or unwilling

to digest food. The examination of the more or less decomposed stomachs of such fish in a laboratory cannot for a moment be held to settle the general question, or to overbear the repeated experiences of practical fishermen. An ounce of fact is worth a ton of theory.

The kindred question—"Why does a salmon take a fly?" has been much discussed among anglers. It is frequently maintained that he does so out of curiosity, or even annoyance. It seems much less far-fetched to suppose that he does it from the motive which leads him to take a prawn, a minnow, or a worm. This can hardly be curiosity, and is, as I believe, the desire and intention to eat it. A properly fished fly presents a remarkable resemblance to a living object, and if a salmon has not previously been in the habit of eating such an object, and does not exactly know its nature, it need not appear the less tempting to him. It is not always curiosity that impels a man to help himself to an entrée, the composition of which is unknown to him.

The supporters of the curiosity theory have usually drawn a picture of the fish being almost worried into taking a fly by the manner of its

darting to and fro over their heads. Such a picture is Mr. Abel Chapman's inimitable account (in his "Wild Norway") of a salmon rising to a Jock Scot. But all anglers are familiar with occasions on which a fish has snapped at the fly the instant it was presented to him; and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that such fish are on the look-out for something to eat, and mean to have anything which looks tasty.

The excellent Pontoppidan, Bishop of Bergen, who wrote in 1751 "The Natural History of Norway," has some remarks on the salmon, which show that 150 years ago men were already perplexed as to the salmon's food. I quote from the English translation of his work, a fine old folio published in London in 1755.

"The Lax, Salmon, Salme, a well-known, considerably large, and excellent Fish, has bright silver scales, but the flesh is red. It is allowed by all to be one of the most delicious and best-tasted Fish; however, the physicians do not reckon it wholesom, when it is eaten fresh, in too great a quantity.

"As the Salmon is not fond of biting at a bait, and there is seldom any Fish found in its

belly, some are inclined to think that (as it is said of the Herrings) it lives upon water alone, and that this renders its flesh so delicate: but this opinion is refuted by Willoughby. He says, 'Mr. Johnson assures me that the Salmon is fond of fine red worms, when they are thrown into the water, but I shall not determine this point. I shall only observe, that, as the Lord of Nature, who has created nothing in vain, has given the Salmon good teeth, we may conclude the former opinion is without foundation; for it were absurd to say they were given them only for weapons, to defend themselves against Fish of prey. I am to observe also, that one of my correspondents affirms, that he has found small Herrings in a Salmon's belly: nay, though the Salmon is but seldom disposed to bite at the hook, yet he will sometimes do it.'"

Pontoppidan held the opinion still asserted by some Norwegians who own fjord-nets, that "The Salmon unquestionably breeds in the sea, tho' it is not entirely to be deny'd but that they may sometimes breed in rivers also." He says they "seek the rivers, partly to refresh themselves in fresh water, and partly to rub, or wash off in the strong currents, and deep water-

falls a kind of greenish vermin, called Salmon-lice, that get in between their fins, and plague them in the Spring Season. These insects are wisely designed by the Great Creator, to drive this rich and valuable Fish, as it were, into the hands of mankind, who use several arts to catch them."







### A III

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Shakespeare, *Henry IV*, part 2

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Lars.

## CHAPTER III

### LARS

"Some smack of age in you, some relish of the saltness of Time."

—SHAKESPEARE, *Henry IV.*, part 2.

LARS is dead. He died on Sunday last, and has been buried to-day, Saturday, June 27th. His end was swift and merciful. Two or three days before he was strolling about and watching the fish leap opposite his cottage by the Lower Stream. On Sunday afternoon he was sitting up, but saying that he felt cramp he went to bed and died within an hour. His son, the local shoemaker, told me that he was close on eighty-six, and from other sources I learn that this is correct.

I attended his funeral this morning. A more touchingly simple and primitive ceremony could not be imagined. The absence of a professional undertaker saves these poor peasants from the vulgarities which beset funerals in towns. The distance to the churchyard is about three miles by road. The coffin, decked with simple flowers

and sprigs of fir, was driven on one of the long carts of the country, and the relations and friends followed, some on foot, others in stol-kjaere. I expected to find the priest waiting at the church; but it was not so. Lars died without the assistance of a doctor, and was buried without benefit of clergy.<sup>1</sup> At the head of the procession drove two men, known to me by sight as ordinary peasants, who at intervals raised a lugubrious chant. Arrived at the churchyard our horses were tied to the railings and we followed the coffin, borne by our two fishermen and two other neighbours, into the church. This is a bare wooden shed, with no decoration save a highly painted wooden altar, on which were laid the priest's vestments. The men sat on one side of the aisle, the women on the other. The latter were all clad in dark clothes, on their heads the decent shawl which is so seemly, and is unhappily giving place to a travesty of the fashionable hat; the men in their dark blue homespun suits, which give

<sup>1</sup> I have since learnt that the priest on his next visit to the church says prayers over the graves of those who have been interred since he was last there. Considering the enormous extent of his parish, which contains four churches, of which the furthest is twenty-eight miles from this, it would be impossible for him to attend all funerals. Service is held in each church once a month.

them at all times a somewhat sombre aspect. The only exception was our Anders, who thought it fitting to appear in a light brown check suit, which I had recently given to him. Probably the magnificence of this attire was held to compensate for its incongruous hue.

The two men who had chanted on the road proceeded to conduct the service, which was short, in the same manner. The coffin was then carried to the grave, where there was more chanting, and when the service was over, the grave was at once filled with earth, a process in which, as there did not appear to be any professional gravediggers, all the men took a hand in turn. And so Lars was laid to rest; so they

“Gave

His body to that pleasant country's earth.”

It was rather a shock to English eyes to see the state of the churchyard. The graves were covered with rank grass and weeds, and the iron or wooden crosses erected on many of them were tumbling in all directions. The most pretentious tomb, belonging to an old family still represented here, was in no better case than the rest. The whole bore an aspect

of gross neglect. It must certainly be the case that, in a country like this where the church is only used once a month, and most of the parishioners live many miles away, it should play a less important part in their lives than the church in an English village, but one would at least expect the priest, who is always a cultivated gentleman, to enjoin on the people a better care for the graves of their dead.

Lars' death will leave a sad blank in our lives here. He was ever ready for and appreciative of a little joke, and his age gave him a somewhat privileged position. Something of a by-gone day still clung to him. He was ignorant and uneducated, a peasant of the lowest class, speaking a dialect un-Danish enough to satisfy the most ardent Norwegian patriot; but there was a native courtesy in his manner which is quite wanting in the younger men.

Like many Norwegians he was brimful of curiosity—as to one's age, pursuits, and the cost of one's fishing-tackle and belongings. I have always carefully concealed the real amount of Messrs. Hardy's account for a split cane rod, and generally find that ten krone<sup>1</sup> passes as a

<sup>1</sup> Eighteen krone = £1.

satisfactory reply to the query as to its cost. To say more would be to lay oneself open to the suspicion either of extravagance or of lying.

He would always, if it were at all possible, appear to understand any remarks addressed to him. "Tempus fugit," said some one. "Ya ya," said Lars, with a most suitable air of resignation, probably judging something of the meaning from the tone.

In some ways he was what is called "very human." I told him that I heard Mr. —, who had fished here previously, was having very poor sport on a certain well-known river. "I'm glad of it," said Lars, "he owes me thirty krone."

His contempt for a poor fisherman and for bad tackle was unbounded and never concealed. It happened that the first year we were here an English yacht came up the fjord with a large party. We dined on board, and during dinner I mentioned that Lervik Pool would be in order for fishing about 11 P.M., and that if one of the party would like to fish, I should be pleased if he would do so. The young ladies exclaimed, "Oh! Mr. Blank is our fisherman, he must go." Mr. Blank modestly deprecated the honour; he



said that his experience was confined to trout, that it had never fallen to his lot to fish for salmon, and that he doubted his being equal to the task. But they would take no denial; and at the time appointed Mr. Blank emerged from his cabin suitably attired, bringing a rod and tackle. I did not much like the look of the latter, and urged him in vain to use mine. He was rowed by the unwilling Lars to the head of Lervik Pool, while I stood on the bank, and almost at the first cast he hooked a fish of 12 or 14 lb. When he had landed, Lars, who had the air of washing his hands of the whole proceeding, said that it was too dark for him to see to gaff the fish, and that I must do so. I took the gaff and stood ready by the water's edge. Mr. Blank had up to this time played the fish well and carefully, but in one of its final rushes he allowed the line to come against my shoulder, and the cast broke and the fish was gone. Lars took the rest of the cast, which was a poor one, broke it into small fragments, threw them on the ground and spat on them with a gesture of indescribable contempt. I hope that if this should meet the eye of Mr. Blank, he will forgive me for publishing his sad

story, and that the death of many salmon to his rod since then has atoned for the loss of the first he hooked.

It is a dangerous matter to attempt to gaff a fish for a friend. An unfortunate stroke may make an enemy for life; less has sometimes originated a blood-feud. A well-known angler once hooked a very big fish on the Conway, when unaccompanied by an attendant. Seeing a neighbour, with whom he was slightly acquainted, leaning over a bridge and watching the sport, he called out, "Come down, Major, there's a good fellow, and gaff this fish for me!" "No," replied the Major deliberately. "No, I won't; I have a wife and family at home."

To rustics unconnected with fishing, who in any way obtruded their presence, Lars was anything but polite. At the foot of the Fos, on each side of the river, are saw-mills, and it occasionally happens while one is fishing that men row up boats with logs to be sawn. As a rule they are considerate and keep close to the shore, where they do little or no harm, but Lars never missed an opportunity of letting fly at them with a torrent of what I understood to be forcible Norwegian language, and I never

remember one who seemed capable of making an adequate reply. Before such strangers he thoroughly enjoyed showing off, and if we killed a fish or two while they were looking on, he would always treat it as the most ordinary occurrence, not worth making a remark about. He had a rare opportunity of posing in this way on a certain Sunday evening in June. The Norwegian Sabbath begins at 6 P.M. on Saturday and ends at 6 P.M. on Sunday. Of the Saturday portion we never take any notice, but we have always observed the Sunday rest till 6 P.M., and Lars was a stickler for the point. If you said to him at 5.30, "Lars, the tide is right, we will begin," he would reply, "Klokken sex." On this particular Sunday service had been held at our church in the morning, and many peasants had come down from the surrounding mountains; and as it was a nice drizzling afternoon such as the Norwegian loafer thoroughly enjoys, a number of people were hanging about to see if we had any sport. It was a flood-tide, and out of deference to Lars' scruples we were rather late in beginning, but there was an hour's fishing before it became too high. At the head of Lervik, almost at the first cast, I hooked a fish,

and after a short struggle Lars gaffed him—a fish of 17 lb. The spectators crowded round; Lars threw the fish into the boat without a word, and held it steady for me to step into. The process was shortly repeated, this time with a fish of 13 lb. Never a word said Lars, and, not wishing to spoil his game, which I saw by the gleam in his ancient eye he was thoroughly enjoying, I held my peace. A third time, almost at the first cast, I hooked a fish. This one gave more trouble; we landed on the Lervik shore, but he ran down into the deep water at the bottom and went so far over to the other side, that we judged it quicker to cross the river in the boat and kill him on the Lower Bank. He weighed 18 lb. It was not over yet. The tide was getting too high, but it was worth trying a final cast. This time a 14-pounder took the fly, and was duly killed on the Lervik bank.

It was now seven o'clock, and it had been sharp work for an hour. Not a sound had Lars uttered, nor had he looked at me. He threw the fish as they were killed into the boat, as a man might throw herrings, and he had an air of being rather bored. The rustics stood

open-mouthed at a respectful distance, and doubtless they carried back to their mountain fastnesses strange tales of the Englishman and the salmon. If such things were done in an hour on Sunday afternoon, what must the week bring forth? This was, I think, the impression Lars meant to convey.

His ancient wife survives him; she was a little older than her husband. I once said to him, "I am sorry to hear your wife is sick, Lars." "She must expect to be sick," he replied, "she is so old." I said, "How old is she?" "Eighty-five," he answered. "And how old are you?" "Eighty-four and a half." She will continue to reside in the cottage by the Lower Stream, a lonely life for the poor old thing. Lars had saved a sum of £70, and she is considered locally to be "left very well off."

We only knew Lars in his old age, when his sight was dim, and cannot therefore judge whether in his prime he was a good gaffer. As a rule I have not found Norwegians to excel in this respect. In spite of the stolidity of their ordinary demeanour, they seem to become highly nervous when it comes to

“clipping” a fish. One excellent fisherman, in other ways the brightest and most alert of his race, would do all sorts of eccentric things. His worst performance was to stick the gaff into an eighteen-pound fish and then to let go the handle. Out into the pool again went the fish, with the hazel stick bobbing along the surface. Luckily the hook held and it all ended happily, but I confess that the incident tried the angler’s temper, and that he said hard things. One brilliant exception I have met, and if he failed on a certain critical occasion it was because he essayed a task beyond the powers of man. I was fishing the Aarø, perhaps the most remarkable river in Norway. It is barely a mile from fjord to fos; it is almost entirely a foaming torrent, with hardly a pool that anywhere else would be called a pool, and yet its fish are the biggest of their kind. I believe they average at least 25 lb.; at some seasons 30 lb. Forty-pounders are not uncommon, and a fish of 68 lb. was killed there with a prawn some years ago. (His effigy, with a fly in its mouth, frequently adorns a shop window in Pall Mall.) It was in August of the very hot season of 1901, and the river

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was in highest flood and very milky from the melting of the glacier which it drains. I used six-ply gut, and felt no certainty then that I should not be broken. To gaff a fish the gaffer had to wade into this fearful torrent, and sometimes his life appeared to be more in danger than the fish's. In a deep backwater called the Prawn Hole—where the 68-pounder was killed—I hooked, on a prawn, a fish about 40 lb. weight. He was a very strong fish, and after a terrific rush across the main river into a small pool opposite, he went down stream about a hundred yards, where he found shelter behind a rock some distance from the shore. It seemed difficult to dislodge him from this post, and even if he were moved he would probably make down further, when his capture would be almost hopeless. So my gaffer, in spite of my objections, waded out into the torrent up to his waist. Steadying himself as well as he could, he made a dive at the fish, and gaffed it. He dragged the fish to the surface and a fierce struggle ensued; but he was powerless to get back to the shore with it, and had to let it go again. The fish went down the rapid below, and then the hooks came

away. The poor gaffer, wet through, dead beat and overcome with chagrin, threw himself on the ground and uttered—not the wild oaths of his fierce forefathers—but the word “Damn.” So do we English spread our civilisation over the face of the globe.



## CHAPTER IV

### MORE SALMON

"The cry is still, They come."

—SHAKESPEARE, *Macbeth*.

THIS year, at the beginning of July, the river is again in highest flood—as high, at least, as in the flood of early June. It has been raining hard for days; but the flood, though helped by the rain, is not so much due to it as to the south wind which has melted the great reserves of snow. At Sande, ten miles up the valley, the water is out on the meadows, and the pools in the river are obliterated. Below, it runs within its banks, "brimming and bright and large"; the falls are foaming races of white water, with never a trace of the black rocks which usually emerge from the torrent.

For the last week or more salmon have been very scarce. There has been a great run of grilse, and if the water has been suitable for them, it is difficult to understand why their elders should have declined to face it. But



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Waters of the Ohio

*Fos at Owen.*



the fisherman's path is strewn with unsolved mysteries. So bad did our prospects appear that I went so far as to telegraph to H., who was coming out from England with my wife, that unless he was content with grilse-fishing, he had better not come. Of course he came, but I had relieved my conscience of some of that responsibility which a host feels for a guest's sport, and as usual, the unexpected happened.

It is said by gamblers that to go on a journey brings luck, and perhaps the fact that I took a holiday of three days, and went to Bergen to meet the travellers, wrought a change of fortune.

It began on the night of our arrival. It was late, and dark, and the fishermen had gone to bed; but it occurred to us that a cast or two from the Lower Bank might be worth the trouble. So we put on our waders and went forth, and commenced to fish close together. At once I hooked a fish of 15 lb. or so, which after a good fight I beached—it was too dark for gaffing. Scarcely was he on the bank, when H.'s reel sang to a bigger fish. Down he went full speed to the fjord, and H. after him,

the sparks flying as the nails in his brogues clattered on the stones. Alas! almost at the point when the river joins the fjord the hook came away and we were left repining.

For the next few days we killed several fish a day, not counting the grilse, which as the salmon came seemed to be less plentiful. These salmon were all fresh run, but none had sea-lice. We thought it possible that they were fish which had run earlier, and being unable to face the weight of water coming over the Fos had returned to the fjord—

“The wat’ry herd, affrighted at the roar,  
Rest on their fins awhile, and stay,  
Then backward take their wond’ring way.”<sup>1</sup>

From some of the rivers farther north we hear accounts of unusually good sport in the lowest beats, while in the upper waters it is below the average. In a year of normal water and temperature, these lower beats are mostly of little good, as the fish run through rapidly to the higher reaches.

We have often wondered what were the habits of fish here before the ladder enabled them to reach the upper water. That they came

<sup>1</sup> Dryden.

to the foot of the Fos there is no question; although it seems that they were less numerous and smaller than their descendants. It is hardly likely that many would attempt to spawn in the tideway. More probably they returned to the fjord after an exhilarating fresh-water bath below the foaming fall, and ascended some of the smaller streams which run into it lower down. About the year 1884 Lieutenant Breton, R.N., made an extensive tour in Norway, and published an account of it, entitled "Scandinavian Sketches" (London, 1885). He was not an angler, but he is the only one of the early travellers whom I find to have visited this place. This is what he says of it:—

"I passed over to Ousen, the residence of Mr. Rennord, a clergyman, who pressed me to remain until the weather became more settled. Having come upwards of one hundred miles by water, and being almost cramped to death, his invitation was accepted; and nothing could exceed his kindness and attention. He is the only gentleman I met in Norway who has not adopted the practice of smoking, which he considers, and I coincide with him in opinion,



as one of the greatest of human follies. The house stands at the head of Dals Fjord, here very beautiful; near it is a large waterfall, but of no great height, beneath which three hundred salmon were caught the preceding season, and only four during the last."

We have our good years and our bad years now, but happily we have not experienced such an extraordinary discrepancy as this. As the Norwegians had not yet acquired the art of fishing with a rod and line, and the few English sportsmen who had visited the country at that date had gone farther north, to the Namsen, the Stenkjaer, or the Gula, these fish must have been netted. Breton might have given us further details; but what can you expect of a man who neither fished nor smoked?

In no Norwegian river with which I am acquainted is there any autumn run of fish, such as occurs in Scotch rivers. But stragglers no doubt run until the end of the season. The ordinary legal close time begins on September 15, but on many rivers, or on parts of them, such as on the upper water here, there is an extension of rod fishing until September 30. Here the main run is over

by the middle of July, but occasional fresh-run fish are caught in August. I once stayed on another river in Norway until the end of September; and then the last fish with sea-lice was killed on September 16. It was a small river which fish ascended for four or five miles only. Half-way up, the river formed a small lake, not quite a mile long. In this lake, as the season wore on and the river fell very low, all the fish collected. Again and again we trolled various kinds of minnows over them, but with little result. At last, in the final week of September, there came a mighty rain-flood, and the fish ran up in hordes into the river above. Red, and black, and thin, and unwholesome-looking as they were, they took ravenously whatever fly was offered to them and with more than the keenness of fresh-run fish. Another problem to vex the poor angler. On the last day of the season the river had fallen again and not a fish was to be seen. Doubtless they had all returned to the lake.

It is strange how salmon, while really in a mood for taking, will come again and again at the fly. In the flood above mentioned, I

rose a fish, unless my memory plays me false, nine times, and hooked and killed him in the end. The stream was running very swiftly under a steep bank, and the salmon and I were on opposite sides of it. As my fly and line reached the water they were snatched by the stream and carried "all anyhow" to my side. But at each cast a salmon rose half out of the water, only to have the fly pulled from him by the devouring torrent. At length I succeeded by going a little higher up, and wading out to the utmost limit, in steadying the fly over him for a second, and he was mine.

There is nothing in angling more satisfactory than fishing for, and hooking, a fish which has already risen and missed, or declined, the fly. In such a case it is best when wading to walk up a few yards and fish down again to the fish rather rapidly. I have known a fish rise twice at the fly in one cast; that is, having missed the fly, to turn round and follow it and rise at it again; but this is a very uncommon experience. But in the more usual procedure, what a tingling of expectation as we approach the fateful spot! what joy of

work well done as we see the auspicious troubling of the waters, or feel the line tighten and the rod bend! what despair as we realise that we have passed the fish in vain! Truly, as Sir Edward Grey writes, "Salmon fishing is the greatest of all sports, that can be had in fresh water." There are some who would omit the latter half of the sentence.

In fishing from a boat, one is not so completely one's own master; but on seeing a fish rise to the fly, I instantly take my bearings by well-known landmarks, and tell my boatman to row up a few yards. If the second essay prove fruitless, it is best to fish down to the end of the pool; and then to rest it for a few minutes and perhaps try a smaller fly.

On many Norwegian rivers the floating logs are a terrible trouble to the angler. It is a common practice to use these waterways as means of transport to the fjords of the enormous quantity of timber which is cut in the interior. The result to fishing is disastrous. The angler fishing from a boat will frequently feel a shock, and be thrown off his balance, as a log strikes the bow. Worse than this, his best

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pools may be hopelessly disturbed by an endless procession of timber—great trunks dashing together, charging the banks, and jamming wherever there is any obstruction. We are not troubled in this way here. There is no great amount of timber in the rocky valley above, and such as is cut is sawn up locally to provide building material, and to make staves for herring barrels. But we are sometimes annoyed by the sawdust from the mills, especially in a flood. This not only floats as a scum on the water, but particles sink to a depth of several feet, and are believed to sicken the fish, or to interfere with their breathing. I have generally found the mill-owners obliging enough in endeavouring to stop the nuisance, when the mischief is done; but it is difficult to get them to take adequate precautionary measures. The usual practice is to build a stone wall below the mill and within it a sort of zareba of bushes to catch the sawdust as it falls. But the wall is rarely built high enough to keep out a very big flood, and when the water reaches the base of the pyramid of dust, it washes some of it away, and the evil is done.

Sawdust is not our only trouble. The ancient craft that sometimes come to load at the wharf, seem to require a great number of ropes and anchors to keep them steady. Some of the masters insist on putting a line across the river and tying it to a rock on the opposite bank. This rope "jumps" in the stream, and even if it does not frighten running fish, it would be a very awkward obstruction in case of a fish, while being played, going down out of Lervik or Ladder Pools. Happily this has never happened when a rope was out; but if ever a big one is lost in this way, there will be trouble. I argued the subject with one old mariner. I asked if when he went to Bergen he put a rope across the harbour. He said "No; it would be in the way of the steamers." I replied that my fishing was quite as important as any number of steamers, and that the rent exacted from me for it would buy his old boat and the cargo too; but he remained unmoved. I turned to Anders, and said, "Shall I cut the rope, or shall I go to law with him?" "It is best," replied Anders with much wisdom, "for you to cut the rope, and let *him* go to law." I contented myself

with untying the rope when I went out to fish, only to find it put out again on my next appearance. It is difficult for a stranger to get at the rights and wrongs of such a case. I gather that it is necessary for the district council to pass a bye-law, prohibiting such obstructions. It does not seem equitable for a chance comer to be able so to interfere with the fishery, and the free passage of boats.

Since writing my remarks on salmon feeding in fresh water,<sup>1</sup> I have read a recent American book, "Salmon and Trout," by Dean Sage and others (New York, 1902), in which the views expressed on this question are so similar to my own, that they appear to me eminently reasonable. This testimony from the other hemisphere is the more emphatic as it is based on the experience of a fly-fisher. The writer states that in the Atlantic rivers of North America bait fishing for salmon is almost unknown; though he mentions successful experiments with various lures from a chunk of raw beef to a live butterfly. This catholicity of taste brings to mind the saying of an Irish gillie, that "the salmon is the hungriest baste that walks the earth."

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter II.

The anglers of the Canadian rivers are to be congratulated on their freedom from the vice of bait-fishing to which so many fishermen in the British Isles and Norway have given way. Yet there are not wanting champions to fight for the true faith; notably Sir Herbert Maxwell, who in a recent letter to the *Field* deplored the degradation of a well-known tidal pool in Norway, where the use of prawn and minnow has entirely superseded fly-fishing, and it is believed that fish will no longer rise to the fly. It is a little difficult to understand why fresh-run fish should be so influenced; it seems more probable that the fishermen are affected rather than the salmon.

What one does, others must do. It needs a very strong mind to persevere with the fly in water which is constantly raked with prawn or gudgeon, and the result is that rivers are more and more given up to the baser arts. It is a pity that no such form of taboo as preserves trout in an English chalk stream from the dangerous attractions of worms and minnows has grown up with regard to salmon.

The first year we were here I asked Lars if salmon were ever killed with the prawn. He

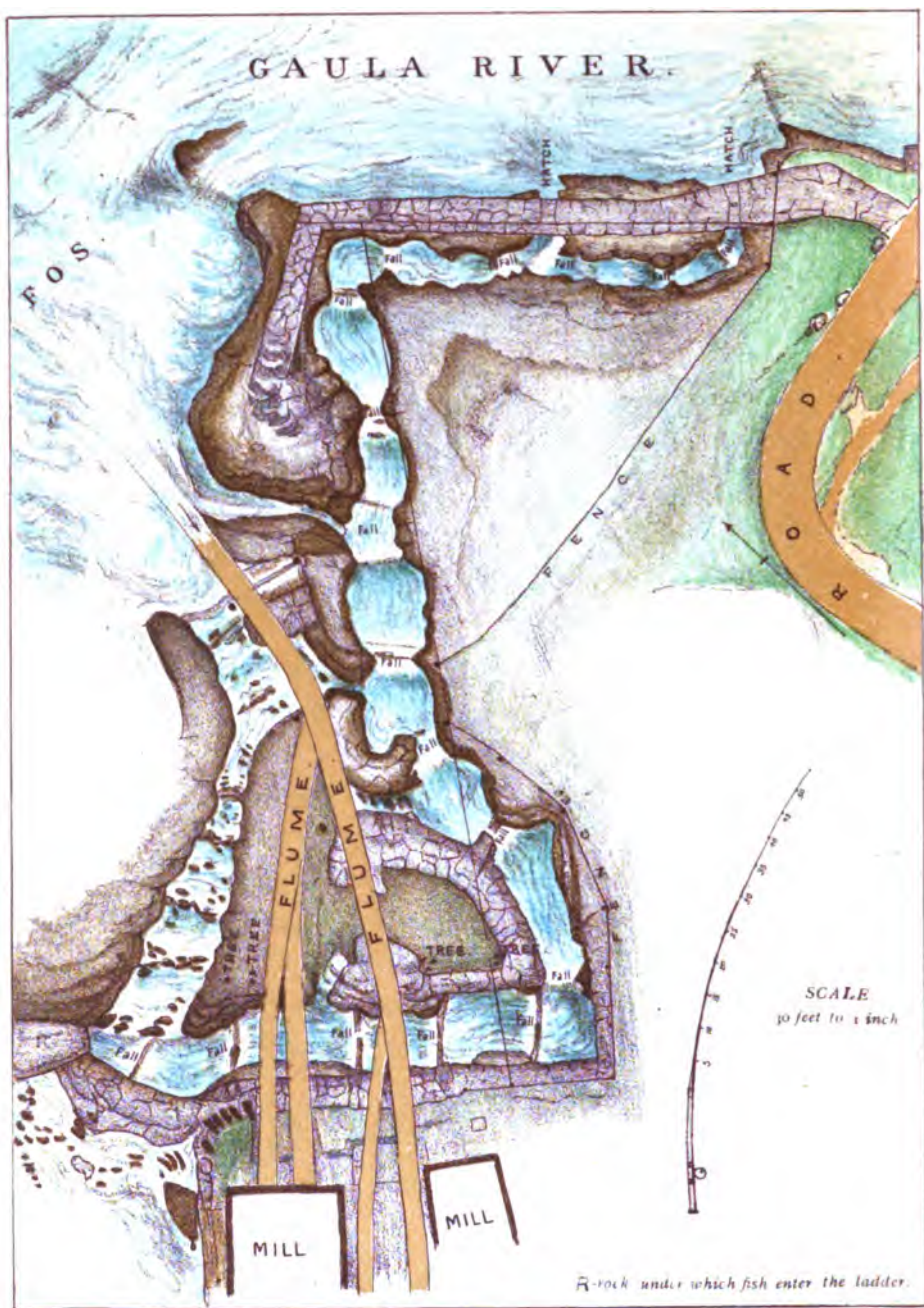


replied unhesitatingly—*splendide mendax*—that they would not look at one. I learnt later that he remarked to Anders that they must not let us use a prawn, or we should give up fly-fishing; and I loved him for his timely falsehood. With a wisdom all his own, he gauged the angler's weakness.

Late in the season, when salmon will not take a fly, or in water which is not suitable for fly-fishing, I cannot see that there is any objection to the use of bait. It is only as destructive of the finer sport, when and where possible, that it is to be deplored. And on this view of the matter we base our practice here.

Attractive as is our tidal water in its varying moods, and for its sure promise of sport, we have perhaps in the persistent fishing of the past month worn it a little threadbare. Such excursions as we have made to the upper waters have met with no success, and we have hurriedly returned to our former haunts, with the air of men who have survived a forlorn hope. But unless the habits of fish have undergone a radical change, they ought now to be found above the Fos. It is high time for us to seek pastures new.





PLAN OF THE LADDER.

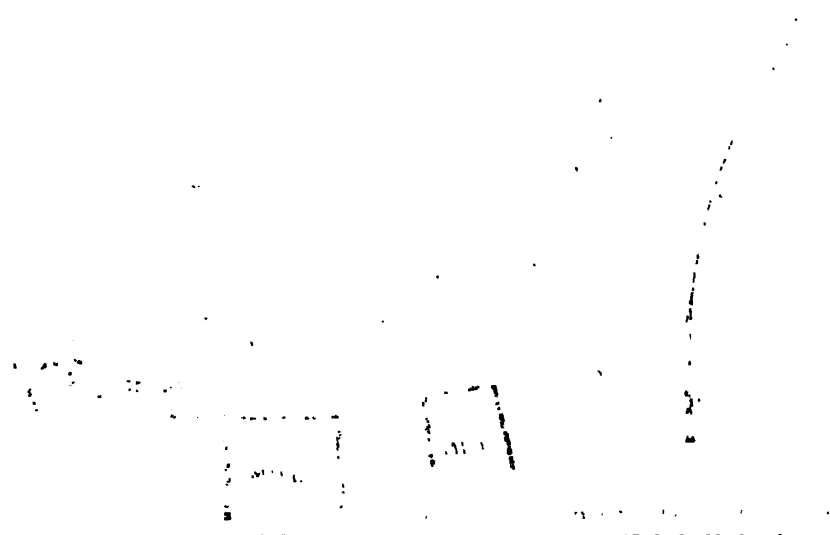
## CHAPTER V

### THE LADDER

"Ah! who can tell how hard it is to climb!"

*—Boswell, *Life of Johnson**

THE ladder which gives fish access to the river above the great Fos was constructed about thirty years ago by an Irish gentleman, who owned the property of Osen, extending for about two miles upwards from the mouth of the river on the left bank, and made contracts with the other proprietors interested, which gave him the fishing rights for a long term of years. It was probably the most important fish-pass in existence at that period though it has since been surpassed by the great Vefsen ladder, and possibly by others. It has in every way been most successful. Not only has it created a salmon fishing river ten or twelve miles in length, but by opening up extensive spawning grounds it has vastly improved the race of fish which had previously been confined to the water below the great Fos.



PLAN OF THE BUILDING

## CHAPTER V

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—BRATTIE, *The Minstrel*.

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if one may believe the evidence of the oldest inhabitant, is still continuing.

The obstacle to be circumvented is an almost sheer fall of fifty or fifty-five feet in height. To mitigate the steepness of the ascent the ladder takes a zig-zag course. The entrance to it is directly from a natural shelf at the bottom of the Fos, the water on which is at high-tide level with the pool below. There are in all sixteen steps, the leaps from one to the other varying from three to four feet in height. A few are rather rapids, up which fish easily swim, than leaps. The little pools are of different size and shape; for the most part the water in them is rough and foaming, but some have more or less quiet backwaters in which fish may rest awhile. At the top is a strongly-built wall running upwards from the head of the fall and high enough to keep the river at highest flood out of the ladder; and through this fish-pass by one or other of two hatches, used respectively in big and small water, into the quiet and deep pool above. The greater part of the ladder is blasted out of the rock, the steps being built up with stonework and baulks of timber; the whole presenting

a very natural appearance, a point of some importance. Certainly fish do not seem to have any trouble in discovering it, or to be afraid of the confined stream in which they find themselves; and we have occasionally killed fresh-run fish in the river above, which must have come straight through from the fjord with very little delay.

In most years single fish begin to run up the ladder early in June, but there is as a rule no great run until towards the end of the month, and sometimes it does not occur until July. Such a run generally takes place when the river is rising after rain, the temperature of the water being also higher. But this rule is not invariable. I have not yet been able to discover any law in obedience to which thousands of fish suddenly take it into their heads to run up.

Below is a list extracted from my Diary of the earliest dates on which fish have been seen in the ladder, and those on which there was any considerable run of fish:—

1898. (No record of the first fish seen, but fish were certainly in the ladder before June 14.)

„ July 5.—A large number going up.

1899. June 11.—A fish.



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1899. July 2.—A great many fish running. The run continued for two or three weeks.

1900. June 13.—A fish.

„ „ 15-19.—Several fish.

„ July 1.—Many fish.

„ „ 14.—Ladder crowded with fish after heavy rain.

1901. June 5.—A fish.

„ „ 23.—Numerous fish after continued rain.

1902. June 18.—A large fish.

„ „ 23.—Several fish.

This season there was never any quantity of fish running, and it was reported to me that in August and September there were very few in the river.

1903. June 23.—Some fish.

„ July 4.—A few fish.

„ „ 16.—Ladder very full of fish—a big run, which lasted without intermission for a fortnight.

This year, 1903, in pursuance of its character of a very late and entirely abnormal year, scarcely a fish was to be seen in the ladder until the middle of July. On the 16th the run began. There was no apparent cause. The weather had been cold and the river was falling slightly every day. Certainly the day itself was fine and warmer, but the river was not yet affected. Yet suddenly it was alive with fish. In the course of the next few days thousands

must have gone up. Where they all came from was a mystery. Very few had been showing in the pools below, and sport though good occasionally had been intermittent. I cannot avoid the conclusion that numbers of fish which had come from the fjord in the previous six weeks had dropped back to it again, until the atmospheric change—or whatever it was—occurred, which caused them to make for the upper waters. The run continued without intermission until we left at the end of July, but latterly was composed chiefly of grilse, which were coming in from the fjord in great numbers at the time. They were accompanied as usual by a few salmon; on the 22nd we killed two, 13 lb. and 24 lb., with sea-lice. The fine weather which had set in on July 16 lasted until the end of the month. The river was daily higher, and the temperature of the water rose from 50° to 56°. It looks as if the salmon when they commenced running on the 16th knew the conditions which were coming.

When fish are running it is a never-ending source of amusement to us to watch them. You may stand by the side of one of the steps with a crowd of salmon within a few feet of you,

many of them half out of the foaming water. Sometimes a fish will jump one of the little falls, and, merely skimming the pool above, will take the next fall "in his stride." And a glorious sight it is to see a 20-pounder making so light of the obstacles. Other fish seem to have a dislike to jumping, and will swim up the falls, with much twisting of bodies and whisking of tails; a far more toilsome means of ascending, one would suppose. Others seem to have no eye for their work, and will jump short or crooked, and fall back over and over again. Most of the pools are so built that it is difficult for a fish to jump right out on to the rocks, and I have only known one to do so, and be killed.

Very interesting too is it to stand on the wall at the top of the ladder and see fish come through the hatch into the river above. After the turmoil of the little pools it must be a startling change to enter the spacious smooth running river; and they usually appear to pause a moment and to contemplate the situation. Then they sail away majestically into the depths, and unless we chance to meet them higher up, are no more seen.

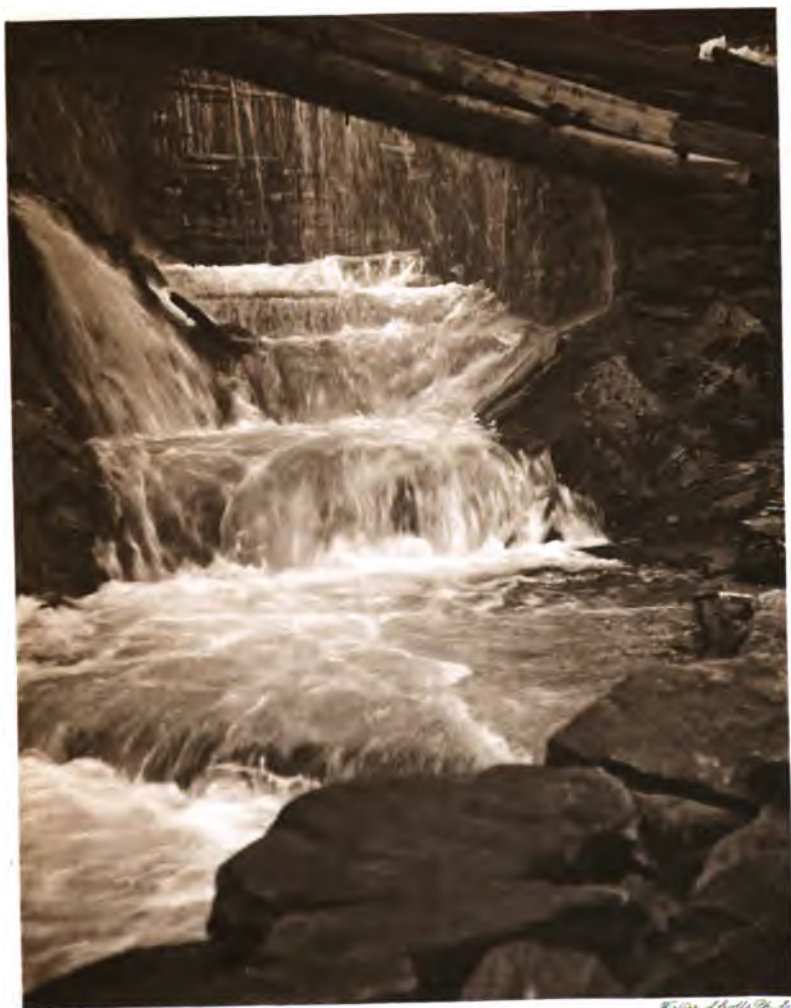


*High Falls*

## A RIVER OF NORWAY

It is very rare to see a fish jump out of the foaming water. Sometimes a fish will jump one of the little pools, and merely skimming the pool above, will fall the next fall "in his stride." And it is very slight it is to see a 20-pounder jump so light of the obstacles. Other fish seem to have a dislike to jumping, and will jump up the falls, with much twisting of bodies and waving of tails; a far more toilsome manner of ascending, one would suppose. Others seem to have no eye for their work, and will jump short or crooked, and fall back over and over again. Most of the pools are so built that it is difficult for a fish to jump right out on to the rocks, and I have only known one to do so, and be killed.

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Walter L. G. Photo

*The Ladder.*



It is fortunate that the inhabitants here have no very highly developed taste for poaching. It would be easy to take hundreds of fish out of the ladder in a single night. In some countries, which shall be nameless, it would require at least four men to guard it, and they would have to be heavily armed. I am thankful to say that I have never had the slightest cause for suspecting any unlawful proceedings on it here.

The best account of salmon ladders in general which I have found in any work on angling is contained in "Fishing in American Waters," by Genio C. Scott (New York, 1869), an interesting and amusing book. After remarking on the necessity of admitting salmon to the upper and shallow portions of rivers, if the race is to be preserved, the author proceeds to discuss the conditions under which salmon can leap up a fall. The main requisite is a sufficiently deep pool below, in which to attain, by means of a run, enough impetus and velocity. The absence of this sometimes makes a mill-dam only three or four feet in height impassable. The provision of sufficient water to take off in for each leap is really the main factor in the success of a ladder; and it has been well carried out



in our ladder here. Mr. Scott gives some particulars and illustrations of different ladders in America and elsewhere. Perhaps the most interesting is the well-known salmon pass at Ballisodare, in the west of Ireland.

An article entitled "Salmon Passes," by A. F. Bruce, A.M.I.C.E., may be found in the Transactions of the Civil and Mechanical Engineers Society, 1887-88, and should be consulted by any one anxious to ascertain the conditions and cost of a successful ladder.

If "whoever could make two ears of corn, or two blades of grass, to grow upon a spot of ground where only one grew before" would deserve well of mankind, then no less meritorious is the man who has peopled a useless river with the noble race of salmon. To the enterprise and ingenuity of the Irishman who planned and built it, this ladder of the river Gaula, in Norway, is a lasting memorial.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE UPPER RIVER

"To waft a feather, or to drown a fly."

—YOUNG, *Night Thoughts*.

WHEN the salmon emerge from the ladder they enter a tranquil stream, gliding with that exaggerated smoothness which often seems to precede a great fall. Ascending, they find themselves in deeper water, and a hundred yards higher up the river runs twenty-five feet deep through a narrow channel, which is spanned by a bridge. In hot weather and low water fish may often be seen lying in these depths, where probably the temperature is slightly lower than on the sun-warmed surface.

As we proceed upwards from the bridge the river makes a rectangular bend to the north, and forms a large pool, which is known to us as Os Pool. The river is broad here and the pool not very well defined. Fish frequent different parts of it in different states of water. In very high water many lie close to the right

bank; in low water in the stream at the head, or at the tail on the shelving shore of a rocky island a short distance above the bridge. In this year of great floods this rock has twice been completely submerged—at the beginning of June and again at the beginning of July—an event which has not occurred before in our experience. It is here that we have sometimes met with the sluggish fish referred to in a previous chapter. Probably they are bad travellers, which have not taken the leaps in the ladder in good style, and have knocked themselves up. But they are not all so wanting in energy. I remember one which went down under the bridge and perilously near to the Fos. To go below the bridge in a boat is not attractive, with the great Fos ahead, and it was necessary to induce this misguided salmon to return.

Owing to its being so near to the house, this pool gets a great deal of fishing in the course of the season. But though it is often crowded with fish, and in the warm evenings of July they will jump around one in very provoking fashion, it cannot be said that the results are satisfactory. For some reason or other fish often do not rise well here. Yet close to the rock at the bottom

of the pool they will sometimes take the fly in water not less than twelve or fifteen feet deep. In rivers so clear as this is, fish will rise from a much greater depth than is usual in less transparent waters.

In this pool we have frequently observed a female goosander (*Mergus Merganser*) with her brood. It is a pretty sight to see her take her young ones on her back, and swim across the river. These birds are said to be very destructive of small fish; their gullet is very capacious, and they have an extraordinary power of digestion.

A couple of hundred yards above Os Pool is a small wooded island, the main stream running on the north side and forming a deceptively beautiful pool. It is said that when the salmon first came up into the river, after the building of the ladder, many were killed here. Now, although the pool looks most inviting, they seem to have taken a dislike to it, and we have risen very few there. Probably the bottom has become too smooth, and a few big rocks dropped into the pool might restore its former fame. This shifting of pools, due to the breaking up of the ice and the wearing effect

of the floes, is one of the curses of Norwegian rivers. Their continual tendency is to become more even-flowing, and to develop long stretches of water useless except for harling, in the place of pools suitable for casting. Now that fishing rights have become so valuable, attempts are frequently made to cope with this tendency, sometimes with success. But such work requires to be done well and carefully. On a river in the South of Norway, with which I am acquainted, the owner some years ago built a wall across a rapid, and created a fine little pool. The wall was built loosely of large boulders and looked very insecure when I visited the river. Recently, in a big flood, it gave way; and not only has the artificial pool disappeared, but the débris has choked up and ruined a pool below, which happened to be the best piece of water on the river.

For half a mile or more above the island there is such a stretch of water. The lower part of it, where the river is broad and comparatively shallow, and flows with a moderate stream, is a great haunt of grilse and sea trout in August, and salmon have occasionally been killed there in July; but its length and the

absence of variety make it a wearisome piece of water to fish.

In the upper part where the river is narrower and the stream more swift, I have endeavoured to make pools by building three stone barricades in the bed of the river, about a hundred yards apart. This work can only be done in a hard winter, when the river is very low and the ice on it very thick. Large blocks of stone are dragged on to the ice, which is then cut and they are placed in position through it, and joined with iron clamps. The work has been very well and solidly done and looks as if it would stand for centuries. These barricades are islands; a portion of the stream is allowed to go between them and the nearer bank. This prevents the great backwash which would otherwise be created. The effect is already very perceptible; and is probably being much increased by the floods of this year. In some places the water is deepening; in others, banks are being thrown up. It is to be hoped that the pools which are forming will suit the fancy of the fish, but it is impossible to predict their likes and dislikes in such matters.

In this part of the river a good deal more

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might be done to make pools, but it is a troublesome and expensive business. Not the least of the difficulties connected with it, is the necessity of settling with the riparian owners. The erection of a barrier in such a swift river may easily have quite unexpected results on the banks below, and if no agreement covering this has been entered into beforehand, the angler may be confronted with a heavy claim for damages. And unless one has a greater security of tenure than is usual nowadays in Norway, it is hardly worth while to do much; especially as one is certain in the future to have to pay rent on one's own improvements.

A little above this we enter a better region. The river contracts and forms a series of natural pools known to us as Aamot's ("Watersmeet," from the junction of a tributary with the main river). The lowest of these is as fine a pool as one may wish to see, fishable in high or low water, from a boat or from the right bank. On this bank the ground is very rocky and rugged, the mountain rising steeply from the river. To facilitate casting, I have erected a long stage. But there is the disadvantage that one cannot follow a fish that

goes down, or at any rate to follow it is a hazardous and difficult business. On one of the last evenings of July this year, I hooked from this stage a 20-lb. fish, which in his first rush, aided by the strong stream, took sixty or seventy yards from my reel. And there he stuck at the tail of the pool, and for a long time nothing that I could do would induce him to come back. To go down the bank was to run the risk of getting hopelessly involved in the big bushes and boulders by the water's edge. Above me on the mountain side ran the road, but it was an awkward climb to it with a fish on, and it looked hopelessly far off. So I decided to stay where I was, and to hold him hard if he showed any inclination to go down further. As often happens, he chose the line of least resistance, and came back to me; slowly, doggedly, and with many resentful rushes and shakings of the head. But back he came, and in the quiet little cove below the stage, the excellent Anders Osen, no mean gaffer for all his humble looks, landed him in perfect style. On this evening the pool was alive with jumping fish, but not another fish would move to the fly. There are some who



think that the killing of a fish in a pool renders it useless for further fishing, and that you had better proceed at once to the next. My experience is quite the other way. I doubt if the other fish connect the extraordinary behaviour of their companion with any outside agency. Once or twice I have tried fishing with two flies, a practice learnt in Ireland. I have given it up, finding on more than one occasion that when I hooked a fish on the tail fly, it was as likely as not that another took the dropper, and to have two lusty salmon pulling different ways on a single gut cast is more than it can be expected to stand.

Above the main Aamot's Pool are two or three casts from the big boulders which line the shore, and then we come to a long rapid, at the top of which is the best-looking piece of water on the river, known as Furenaes Stream. In some seasons it holds many fish. There is a legend that a certain Captain K. hooked a fish in high water from the left bank, which promptly made down the rapid. On this side it is impossible to go down the bank; trees grow close to the water's edge and overhang the river. Close to the bank the water is in





*Second, Yes.*





*Am. ed. 1890*

some places deep, not less, I should say, than six feet. In spite of Lars' endeavours to hold him back, Captain K. took to the river and followed the fish. Lars, it is reported, knelt down and said his prayers, thinking the angler must be drowned. How he managed it I cannot tell; swimming through deep holes in a tearing rapid, burdened with a salmon rod and with a big fish ahead, sounds an impossible undertaking; but he got safely down, and in the end killed the fish, which weighed 26 lb., just above the bridge in Os Pool, nearly two miles below. Truly, a valiant man.

Looking upwards from this stream, we see, half a mile above, the white foam of a fall, known to Norwegians as Rekavik, to us as Second Fos. Below it is a big circular basin, different parts of which are fishable according to the state of the river. But where the river emerges from this basin, as it were in the neck of the bottle, close to some trees on the left bank, is the surest cast. I think we kill more fish here than in any other pool of the upper water. It is to this point that many fish run as soon as they have ascended the ladder at Osen. Doubtless their upward course is

checked by Second Fos, which is difficult of ascent in high water, and they then drop back to this convenient lying ground below. The earliest date on which we have killed a fish here is the 19th of June. It was not a creditable specimen of its race; a queer little salmon of 6 lb.; not, to all appearance, a grilse; but as the earliest fish on record he has held a place in our daily life and conversation, quite disproportionate to his personal merits. Doubtless if we fished here persistently, in the middle of June, we should frequently kill fish; but at that season we are usually having good sport in the lower water, and there is little inducement to waste time on an off chance.

There is one drawback to this excellent pool. When a fish is hooked in the favourite spot by the bushes, there is nowhere near where one can land to play it. It is necessary to row some way up and across the river, and to land by the road—a distance of two hundred yards. This is all very well if the fish will follow the boat, as they often do; but some fish have other views, and prefer to run down out of the pool into Furenaes Stream below. On the whole, however, how comparatively

seldom fish of ordinary size go down very far, if properly handled! Fish seem to know when a novice wields the rod; they at once take command, and the pace at which they will go down stream (and the novice after them) is amazing. "Hands" are as valuable on the river as in the hunting-field.

But there are occasions when nothing will stop a fish. Some years ago W. hooked an uncontrollable fish at this spot. It made down stream, Anders murmuring at intervals that it was the biggest fish ever hooked in the river—"En meget meget stor lax." They landed on the bank in Furenaes Stream, but failed to stop the fish from running into the rough and dangerous rapid below, through which the valiant Captain K. once paddled and swam. So they took to the boat again, and followed the fish down the rapid. It was ultimately killed in Aamot's Pool, and proved to be a 14-pounder hooked in the tail. The more you pull at a fish so hooked, the more you turn its head down stream.

I remember a singular adventure of my friend S. when we were fishing a river farther north together. He hooked a fish at the tail



of a smooth pool, from which ran a steep rapid. The fish went over the edge, and down the stream. There was no time to discuss the situation, so he followed in the boat. Half-way down the stream, the boat bumped on a rock, and S., more intent on the fish than on his balance, took a header over the stern. The boatman contrived to hold the boat on the rock, and S. crawled into it again. "Where's your rod?" said the gillie, who had left his manners in America. "I am sure I don't know," said S., who had other things to think about. After they had groped about with the gaff for some time, the rod was discovered in the bed of the river and rescued. Strange to tell, when the slack line was wound up, the fish was found to be still on the hook. They then proceeded on their journey, and the fish was duly killed in the pool below. This eccentric salmon, which, if my memory is correct, weighed 18 lb., was found to be blind of one eye.

Strange expedients have sometimes to be adopted when a fish goes down beyond an impassable barrier. In a certain Irish fishery there is a bridge, which an angler cannot pass

under. If a fish is hooked above it, and goes down, it is usual for the gillie to stand below and to cut the line, holding the end to which the fish is attached until the angler has passed over the obstacle. The ends are then tied together, and the sport proceeds. A lady who had seen fish killed in this way and no other, went with her husband to Norway. She was on the bank when he hooked a fish, and after waiting a few minutes in expectation, called out to him, "Aren't you going to cut the line?"

In this strange season of 1908 sport in the upper water has been a complete failure. A salmon or two in Os Pool and Aamot's and a few grilse in Second Fos, and that is all. The fish were several weeks later than usual in ascending the ladder; and when they had ascended they would not look at the fly. Certainly at that time the river was rising slowly day by day, and fish seldom take well when that is happening; but considering what a great run there was when at last it came, it is strange that we did not have a little sport. In the big water year of 1899, when fish were also very late in running up, we had excellent

sport right up to the last day of July, when we left. Our hasty generalisation that a big river will always mean good sport has received its death-blow.

The conditions this season have been very unusual. Generally the river is moderately high when we arrive, and if warm weather sets in, it rises a little, and then remains fairly steady for a period proportionate to the quantity of snow which has fallen in the previous winter. When this begins to be depleted, the river commences to fall slowly, and only very exceptionally hot weather, or a great downpour of rain, bring about a rise. This is the state of affairs most favourable to sport.

This year, on the other hand, we arrived to find the biggest flood we have ever seen. For the first fortnight of June the river continued very high. Then extremely cold weather set in (the thermometer was one evening down to 42° Fahrenheit), and the river fell very rapidly. During this period the run of salmon seemed to stop, but a large number of grilse came in. Towards the end of the month, the wind went round to the southward, and there was a good deal of rain. A warm south wind melts the

snow much more quickly than the sun does, and the river rose to very high flood again.

On the 1st of July it was as high as it had been on the 1st of June. With this flood came a fresh run of salmon, and for a week or so we had capital sport. More cold weather followed, and again the river fell rapidly. About the middle of July the weather became warm and fine, and continued so until the end of the month. During this period the river was again steadily rising. This unsettled condition is very bad for sport. If in June the weather had been normal, we should have had big water throughout the month, followed probably by a steady fall through July; and as there were lots of fish, sport would almost certainly have been good.

It is supposed that unless August is very hot indeed there will be plenty of last winter's snow left unmelted till next year; which is therefore likely to be another season of big water.

The great rapid which we call Second Fos consists of two main falls, with a turbid pool between them. By the side of the lower of these a short fish-pass of two or three steps has

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been made to help fish to ascend, but it is not very well constructed and it is doubtful whether fish use it much. When the water is not very heavy they can surmount the falls with no great difficulty. But if the river remains big during July, they are unable to do so, and drop back to the pools below, and to Furenaes Stream, where under such conditions we often have very good sport.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE TOP WATER

“Once more upon the waters ! yet once more !”

—BYRON, *Childe Harold*.

WHEN we leave Second Fos behind us we enter a different land. The road, which in the narrow pass has hung over the foaming waters of the fall, leaves the river as the valley widens into a broad plain, and pursues a more direct course to the next ravine, two and a half miles higher up. Immediately at the top of the Fos, in the very curl of the yet unbroken water, fish often lie, and are sometimes hooked. In such an event it is well to “be aisy” with them, and to induce them to swim up into the less dangerous waters above. One’s natural inclination is to hold tight to prevent them going down. This is quite futile, and in such a desperate struggle a fish is likely to lose his head and his balance, and to be carried by the force of the water over the fatal edge. For the next half mile there is a fair stream in which salmon may

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often be seen lying, but it is too even flowing and smooth to fish for them except on a rough day, or in very big water; and then as a rule we have other fish to fry. This stream commences at a small island, which breaks the smoothness somewhat, and creates a small cast on either side.

For two miles above until the influence of the next rapid, Alvaer Fos, becomes perceptible, the river resembles rather a narrow lake. It is broken by one or two gentle streams, but they are not important from a fishing point of view. In some seasons a good many fish lie in this lake-like stretch. If we were able to devote more time to it, it is probable that we should be occasionally rewarded. Though the volume of water is much greater, it somewhat resembles those West of Ireland streams which are considered only fishable in a breeze. Even when the surface is perfectly still, it is strange how fish may sometimes be lured to the fly. I once had a remarkable experience of this. We were fishing a small river not far from Stavanger. Day by day it had been falling until it was reduced to a few still pools, connected by a mere trickle. Some of these





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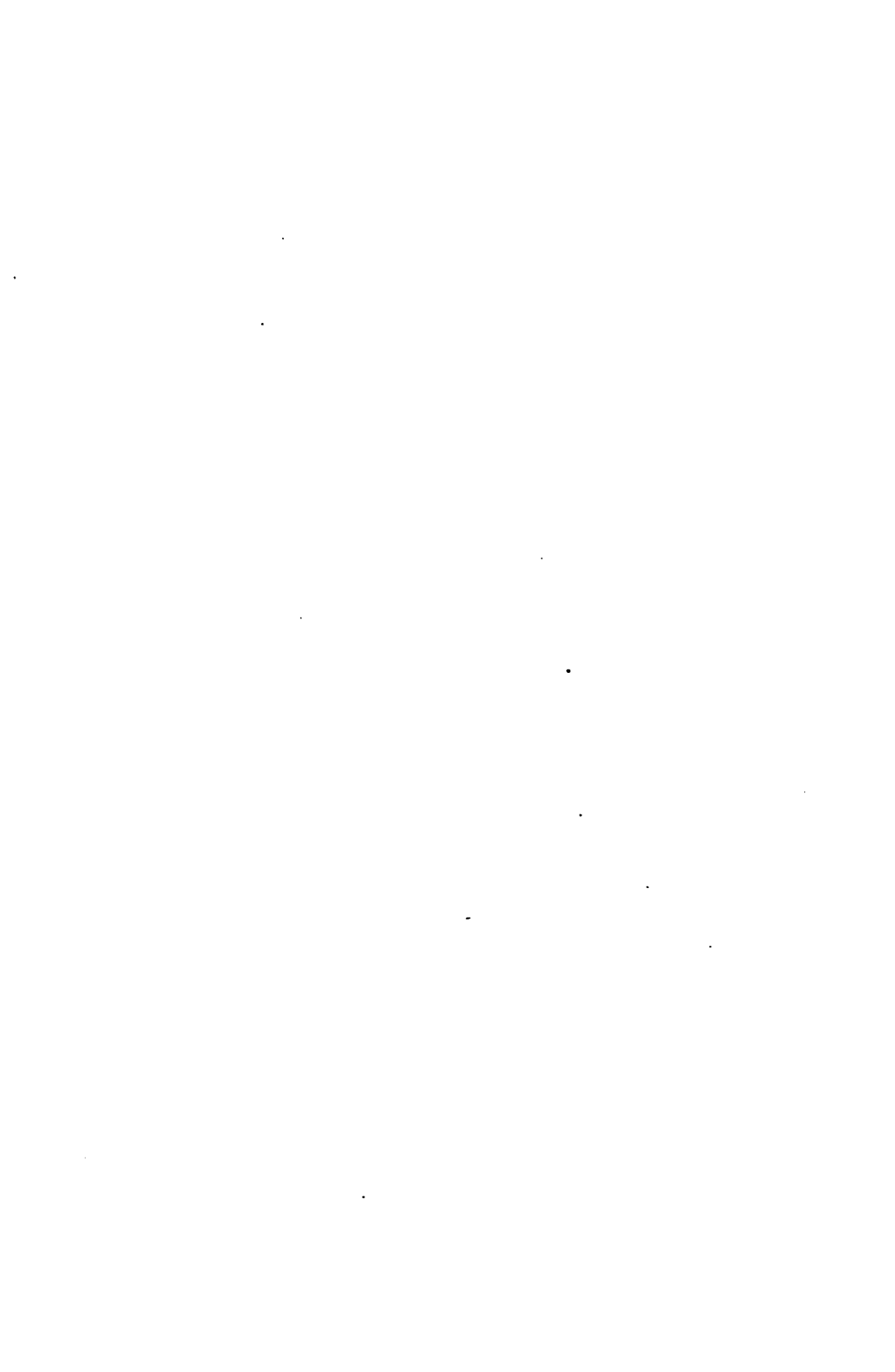
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W. L. G. 1881

.Humer. Fos.



pools contained salmon, which were unable to move either up or down. About noon on a cloudless day, my wife and D. and I were sitting on the bank idly watching some twenty fish, which we knew well by sight, and which doubtless knew us equally well, when it was suggested that I should put a fly over them. It seemed a hopeless, if harmless, proceeding, for as I took my rod and crept along a short pier built to facilitate casting, every fish in the pool must have seen me. I threw a short line with a tiny Silver Wilkinson at the end of it, and almost as it touched the water, a fish came up, made a huge boil on the surface, and returned to his lair without touching it. I waited a few minutes, changed to a small grey-bodied Alexandra, and tried again. Again a fish came up and this time took the fly; and in a few minutes I had a fine 12-pounder on the bank. I have never seen such an occurrence before or since, but it taught me that if there are fish in the water, it is never quite impossible to lure them.

So on a fine afternoon in July, E. and I take the boat which lies at the top of Second Fos. She has brought a trout rod, and the

faithful Anders is to row us up the still water to the great pool below Alvaer Fos. The rest of the party are taking a holiday, and will meet us by the Fos, and we shall picnic in the woods. As we row up, we trail our flies behind, she a cast of trout flies, I a Jock Scot. The river trout take them with a reckless indiscrimination, but to-day they are not rising very well. So we have leisure to admire the scene; unlike the angler I have somewhere read of, who, being asked what he thought of the view, indignantly replied that he had come to Norway to fish, not to look at scenery. And very lovely it is. On one side the wooded hills come to the water's edge, with here and there a grassy glade. On the other, we look across the vale to the hills which separate us from the Sogne Fjord, still bearing great drifts of last winter's snows. Behind us are the steep and rugged rocks of Furenaes apparently barring the end of the valley, and, towering above all, the great mass of the Stor Hest. No salmon disturbs our contemplation of these beauties, and at length we come in sight of the great foaming rapid of Alvaer Fos.

A rapid it is, or a series of rapids, rather than a fall. In some heights of water fish can ascend it, but in order to facilitate the ascent, two short ladders have been blasted out of the rock. Between the two main rapids, which are thus rendered easy to surmount, lies a small pool, deep and turbid, in which fish break their upward journey. It is not suitable for fishing with a fly. Below the Fos is a great pool, to all appearance another Lervik, but in practice somewhat belying its looks; and below that a gentler stream, in which, as it deepens on the left bank under some trees, big fish often lie, and will sometimes take. These two pools I try in vain; the river is low and the water warm, and probably the fish are cooling themselves in the white foam beneath the Fos. So we land and eat our supper with the rest of the party, who have come up by road. Meantime Anders is peering into the ladders, and the small holes in the Fos. Suddenly he beckons with a mysterious air, and points to the mid-Fos pool already mentioned. We crawl to his side, and looking cautiously over the precipitous rock, we see below us and within a few

feet of our faces, half-a-dozen salmon. It is impossible to put a fly over them, and I have no other lure with me; unlike a friend of mine, who always "happened to have a prawn in his pocket." But the sight of these fish excites cupidity, and to-morrow I will come again better prepared.

Then we start on our homeward row. At the tail of the second pool some trout are rising, and E. tries a few casts. Suddenly there is a boil and a splash, and the little ten-foot rod bends, and the reel whirrs. Can it be a big brown trout? or is it a veritable lax? It is almost her first essay with the rod, and the excitement is intense. Trembling we land on a shelving shore, and at length after the fish has made many a desperate run he is safely brought to the net, and turns out to be a 4-lb. grilse. And so we do not return empty-handed. We ought to have had a salmon too. Coming down the river through the territory of the trout, I had put a trout cast on my light salmon rod. I tried the water below Second Fos on the way home, and did not take the trouble to change the gut. There I hooked a salmon, which made

down stream and quickly broke me; a very proper warning against the use of inadequate tackle.

The next evening I began operations by driving up to the top of the fishing. This is at Sande Fos, about two miles above Alvaer. A few fish surmount Sande Fos late in the year, and there are parr above, showing that fish spawn there, but from an angling point of view the water is not worth considering. The river between Sande Fos and Alvaer contains six good pools and a long stretch, more suitable for harling than for casting the fly. It is, unfortunately, not of much use to us, as few fish are to be found there till August, and we generally leave at the end of July. The top pool under the Fos is, I believe, often crowded with fish late in the season. On this occasion I rose a fish in the second pool, a fine piece of water below a long rapid, but he did not take hold. I did not waste much time on the lower pools, though I saw one or two fish jump, as I was anxious to try for our friends of the previous day in Alvaer Fos.

Arrived at the pool we crawl to the edge



and see at once that fish are there. Standing well back I drop a prawn into the edge of the stream and it circles slowly round into the backwater where they are lying. Anders, flat on his stomach, with only his head projecting over the edge, reports that four fish run at it. One takes it. I strike and it is well hooked, a fish of about 18 lb. It makes two mad rushes into the stream above, and is hauled back; then once out into the foaming torrent, and in a second is swept over the Fos, my line coming back to me without the prawn and half the trace. It is doubtful whether any tackle will hold a fish in this water, and if it does, how the fish is to be gaffed is a problem. But after resting for ten minutes, and putting up an extra stout trace I try again. As the prawn swings through the backwater, Anders laughs a weird hysterical laugh, and another fish seizes the bait. This time it is a smaller fish, perhaps about 12 lb., and I manage to hold him in the smoother water. But after a minute he dashes out towards the stream, and jumping frees himself. This is enough. There is something fascinatingly piratical about this proceeding, but it is

hardly fair fishing. The chance of landing a fish is very small, and a fish breaking the tackle and getting swept over the fall would very likely be killed. I fish down to Second Fos without success. In the pool below, at midnight, I lose one fish and kill another of 8 lb., and walk home to Osen as the day begins to dawn.

It is a pity that the top water, especially the section above Alvaer Fos, is of so comparatively little use for angling. It contains some of the best pools and streams on the river, and they have the additional merit of being for the most part fishable in low water. But in the generality of seasons fish do not reach them in any quantity before August, and by that time those which ran early have gone off very much in condition, and do not rise well to the fly. There was a Spanish king who regretted that he had not been consulted at the Creation, because he could have suggested several improvements. He might have included a hint that salmon should not lose in the river the brightness and vigour they bring from the sea. How greatly would such an arrangement alleviate the angler's lot! How much does

perfect satisfaction in sport depend on the quarry being in the pink of condition, and of use as human food! It must be a deplorable drawback to the exciting sport of tarpon-fishing, that there is nothing to be done with the fish when killed.

One very early season there were a great many fish in this part of the river before the middle of July. But it was the extraordinarily hot July of 1901, when the thermometer registered  $89^{\circ}$  in the shade at Osen, and the temperature of the river reached  $67^{\circ}$ . In such weather and water fishing is very hopeless. I have heard that trout die at a temperature of  $75^{\circ}$ , and if this is so, the inhabitants of the river must have been getting very nervous at that time. It does not appear that the influence of temperature on salmon has been at all adequately studied, either as regards its effect on their running, or on their taking the fly. Certainly they lose their condition much faster when the water is warm than when it is cold. As far as I have observed the most favourable temperature for angling is from  $49^{\circ}$  to  $54^{\circ}$ .

But as a breeding-place for salmon this top water is all that could be desired. There are

gravel-beds for spawning, and gentle rapids and quiet backwaters for the young fry. Perhaps the fact that they now have free access to it accounts for an improvement in the size and number of salmon, which seems to have taken place here of recent years.

It is necessary in a river of this size and character to use a boat or some other appliance to enable one to get one's fly over the best water. When it is very big, fish will lie close to the shore, and it may be possible to reach them from the bank; in very low water, a good deal may be done by wading. But under ordinary circumstances, some other means must be adopted in the majority of pools. When we first took the river, fishing in the upper waters was very inadequately provided for. Certain places where bank-fishing seemed possible were rendered useless by trees and thick undergrowth. By their agreements, the landowners were bound to cut down any trees within a certain distance of the river, if required. On taking the matter up I found a great unwillingness on their part to carry out this undertaking. It seemed that this might be due to a sentimental dislike of denuding their banks of timber to

which they had been accustomed from childhood ; even perhaps to an æsthetic prejudice in favour of seeing the dimpled stream glide

“beneath the tangled roots  
Of pendent trees.”

Not at all. It arose entirely from a disinclination to unprofitable labour, and when I offered to pay the wages of a wood-cutter, every tree in the valley was at my disposal. From some of the banks so cleared we have erected little piers, about three yards in length and thirty-five yards apart. Beginning from each of these with a short line, and adding a yard or two each cast, it is possible to cover most of the pool. Where, as in Aamot's, the shore is lined with big boulders, some as large as a cottage, it is easy by an arrangement of planks to construct a way from one to the other, and thus to secure a vantage-ground along a great part of the pools. Where this is impossible or inconvenient we have tried a floating raft, made of boards laid on petroleum barrels, arranged in pairs a few yards apart, and anchored in the required spot. There are disadvantages in this contrivance ; a fish may run under the raft, and the line get foul of a barrel or an anchor chain. But in

reply to such objections, it may be urged that the prime and cardinal point is to hook your fish, and that such difficulties (the prospect of which may even add a zest to your sport) can be left to be dealt with as they occur. Any fixed standpoint from which to cast is preferable to a boat, wherein you are subject to the vagaries of your boatman.

Still, boats are constantly required. When we arrived we found only two on the upper waters, and learnt that it was customary for each angler to start in one at his top cast, and to descend the river from pool to pool till he came to the end of his water; the boat being taken back by cart next morning. This was a most unsatisfactory arrangement. You could not choose your pool to commence with, you were unable to return to it when once it was left behind, and you were tied to an unchanging routine. So I procured a number of boats, sufficient to provide one for each important pool. Splendid craft, stout, buoyant, and in every way serviceable, are built in Bergen or the neighbourhood, and in this land of abundant timber, cost only thirty shillings each. On the Sundals-Elv and some other rivers it is custom-

ary to use flat-bottomed punts, with a pointed bow and a square stern. As they seemed very convenient, I imported a couple; but our men would have nothing to do with them, and it is useless to fight against local prejudice.

It is very advisable to chain and padlock the boats; for the artful native, even if he does not borrow them for a little private fishing at convenient hours, which he thinks will not clash with our arrangements, is fond of making use of them as a means of crossing the river. And it is annoying, on arrival at a pool, to see your boat on the other side, where you cannot get at it.

## CHAPTER VIII

### OUR NEIGHBOURS

“Those tall grave dazzling Norse  
High-cheeked, lank-haired.”

—BROWNING, *Sordello*.

OUR house stands about two hundred yards to the south of the river, and out of sight of the great Fos. But with a downward gust of wind, its roar falls upon us like the rushing of an express train through the vale. Close to one corner of the house stands a large oak tree, an unusual object in these latitudes. In front is a small enclosed garden, where with painful toil I have striven to cultivate such hardy flowers as will endure ten months' neglect and the rigours of the sunless winter. The soil is very poor, being composed chiefly of minute chips of granite brought down by the river in far distant days; yet if bad for gardening it makes a dry and healthy foundation for the house. Lupins flourish in it exceedingly, and bloom with great luxuriance; and this season



the place is gay with Iceland poppies, and graceful columbines, brought from England a year or two ago, and now well established—the most successful of a considerable variety of plants we have endeavoured to acclimatise. There is also an apple orchard, a lovely object when it blooms in early June. In the trees surrounding the orchard there is always a nest of magpies, a sacred bird in Norway; and the garden is the haunt of a very friendly race of wagtails. This year a pair of pied flycatchers have built in a hole in the roof of the farmer's house here, and all day long are popping in and out. The green woodpecker may sometimes be observed on the trunk of the oak tree; and this July my wife watched for some time a family of a mother and four full-grown young ones on some trees near the road. Norway is not prolific of small birds, but this year they seem to be far more numerous than usual, perhaps owing to a great decrease which we notice in the number of grey crows.

The house, built a hundred years ago, is of the old Norwegian type, solidly constructed of logs with outside boarding. Its roominess and the character of its decorations and appointments

indicate a superior culture and style of living to that of the present inhabitants of the valley. Over a doorway on the landing is a coat of arms, a rare ornament in democratic Norway.



The Norwegian owner of the property lives in a small house close by, and his farm buildings and yard—such a spick-and-span farm-yard as is never seen out of Norway—lie beyond.

The house looks north-west across a meadow to the mouth of the river and the head of

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the fjord. The background is filled by the giant bulk of the Stor Hest, rearing, to a height of 4000 feet, his barren cliffs above the greenery of lesser hills. In his outline an imaginative eye may trace the origin of his name, Great Horse. It is a fair scene, set off here and there by glimpses of white houses and red barns, amid the cultivated clearings. To a point about two miles down the fjord, a small steamer comes thrice a week from Bergen. We cannot see the boat, but we sometimes look for its smoke, which heralds the arrival of our mail, with the eagerness of the Romans watching for the white column at a Papal election. This year we find a telephone line has been constructed to the nearest telegraph office, distant seventeen miles ; and so we are in touch with the outer world. One learns in this poor and thinly populated land how backward we English have been in the use of such appliances.

On St. John's Eve, the 23rd of June, it is customary for the lads and lasses of the country-side to assemble here, and to dance on the green sward in the centre of the farm buildings through the night. A fiddler, to

whom each dancer contributes a mite, makes music. It is our privilege to provide the refreshments, consisting of beer and lemonade. This dance is a part of the celebration of midsummer, some of the customs connected with which are said to date from times long anterior to the introduction of Christianity. Bonfires blaze on the hills, and torches flare from boats on the fjord. There is much leaping through flames; and other heathenish rites are observed. Last year we brought from England some fireworks and coloured lights, and though in the twilight of midsummer night they did not show to advantage, they had a great success. The fiddler was deserted, and at the conclusion of our entertainment we received a round of applause, a most unusual compliment from these shy and stolid youngsters. This year, owing to Lars' death, we give no encouragement to the dance, and it falls through.

There are plenty of young people and children here, but, owing to the enormous emigration to America, there seems to be quite a scarcity of able-bodied men. Enterprise and adventure are in the Norseman's blood. The land breeds more and stronger men than it can support.

A thousand years ago the Vikings—dwellers in viks, or fjords—overran half Europe, carved their way to kingdoms, and founded great families. Rolf the Ganger came from this coast; his great-grandson was Duke of Normandy and King of England. A humble peasant, dwelling on the land his fathers have cultivated for centuries, may represent the elder line of a family whose younger branch is some great house in France or England. But the connections are lost in the mists of antiquity. To-day great Norwegian communities are being founded in America, a land which there is little doubt the Norsemen discovered centuries before Columbus. A few of these emigrants return, not always with dollars. Some settle on the paternal lands, others find a lucrative occupation in catering for tourists. I have heard that quite a large number come over every spring to act as servants, &c., in connection with the tourist hotels, and return to America in the autumn. It cannot be said that these returned emigrants are, as a rule, pleasant people. The dignified reserve of the Norwegian peasant is often replaced by a very objectionable self-assertiveness.

But in spite of the depletion of the adult population, there is a general air of prosperity about the country. In this district first-class roads are being made; and as road-makers the Norwegians are unequalled. Since we have known the valley, several good houses and farm buildings have been built. The people generally are well housed and well clothed. The poorest cottages have glass windows and boarded floors. The wooden houses are cheap and excellent. They are much drier than the badly built stone and brick houses in which most of our people in England live. For £200 you can build a good farm-house with eight or ten rooms. The danger of fire, so serious in towns, is not great in the country.

For clothes, the men wear chiefly a dark blue home-spun, a sombre but serviceable garb. Here the women still work in their traditional dress—a white shirt, scarlet bodice and dark skirt—a custom which is unhappily dying out elsewhere.

As a whole, these peasants are a kindly race. They are certainly very gentle with their animals. The sheep will eat out of your hand. The cow will stand and let the stranger rub

her nose. The horses show by their absence of vice the kindly way in which they have been handled. It is customary for the foals to run with their mothers, when in work. They thus early learn the incidents of travel and the customs of the road.

To their children and servants also, as far as a stranger may judge, they are exceedingly kind. There seems to be a complete absence of the chiding and screaming mother and mistress with whom we are unhappily familiar. The children, though shy with strangers, seem to stand in no awe of their parents and elders. In the relations of master and servant there is little of the assumed deference expected by the payer of wages from the receiver, in countries still under the influence of feudal traditions.

Norway has never known a feudal system, with its accompanying primogeniture. From time immemorial the father's property has been inherited by all his children in equal shares. The subdivision of land seems to have reached its limit long ago. It is customary for the eldest son to buy out the younger children, who

either work for him or go elsewhere to find a living.<sup>1</sup>

As a reverse side of the picture, it strikes a foreigner that, in the relations of these peasants with each other, there is quite an unnecessary amount of jealousy and backbiting. This is possibly a result of peasant proprietorship, and the land-hunger common to countries where other modes of living than on the land are rare. And in any business dealings which a stranger may have with them, he will do well to take no statement on trust.

During the war in South Africa, the sympathies of these people were of course strongly with the Boers; but with the exception of one offensive American-Norwegian who hung over our garden fence, and guessed the Boers were knocking spots out of the British army, they were very guarded in their remarks to us. Lars, on being told that peace was concluded, would only say, "And quite time too." It was chiefly the financial aspect of the war that struck Anders. On any reference to it, he always murmured, "Kost

<sup>1</sup> A most interesting and sympathetic account of this, as of other Norwegian matters, may be found in Laing's "*Journal of a Residence in Norway*," published in London in 1836.



mange krone." My Norwegian was not equal to explaining the rights and wrongs of the case. On the face of it, the Boer position, that of a small nation defending itself to the last against a powerful invader, is more specious and attractive, particularly to such a people as the Norwegians.

And in the prolonged resistance which the Boers were able to make, there is some encouragement for Norway. The difficulties of subduing the country would be enormous. Anders and a few of his friends lying out on the cliffs above Second Fos would make the passage of the valley very hazardous. The whole population goes through a course of military training, though it does not appear that rifle practice is, as in Switzerland, a popular pastime.

A few years ago the possibility of a rupture with Sweden was openly discussed. The Western Norwegians are almost to a man opposed to the Swedish connection. The English are accustomed to blame them for this, but it should be remembered that the union is not yet a hundred years old, and that it was the outcome of the Napoleonic wars, and especially

of the desire of the first Bernadotte to have the kingdom of Norway to fall back on in the event of his losing Sweden, where he felt very insecure. The extreme Separatists were supposed to be ready even to throw themselves into the arms of Russia to obtain assistance against the Swedes. But owing to the outrageous treatment of Finland by the Russian Government, a great revulsion of feeling has taken place in Norway. And in fact Norway, which in the extreme north marches with Russia, has much to fear from her neighbour. The northern harbours, which, owing to the influence of the Gulf Stream, are free from ice all the year round, may some day prove an irresistible attraction to the greater power; and we in England may have to face a North of Europe question and the prospect of a Russian Naval Station within a few days' sail of our shores.

Yet threatened nations live long. The late Mr. Samuel Laing, writing in 1835 ("Journal of a Residence in Norway"), spoke of the danger of Russian aggression as imminent. Many salmon have ascended the rivers since then.

The peasants here are no great sportsmen. There is little or no game on the hills, and the

salmon are otherwise engaged. All the early books on sport in Norway are agreed that, until the advent of the English pioneers, the Norwegians knew nothing of fishing with rod and line. Now the country boys are fond of fishing for trout. Their methods are accurately described in the immortal "Three in Norway":

"They first settle how far they want to cast—say thirty feet. Then cut down a thirty-foot pine tree; take the bark off it, tie a string to the thin end, and a hook to the string; stick a worm on the hook, and go forth to the strife. When the fish bites, they strike with great rapidity and violence, and *something* is bound to go; generally it is the fish, which leaves its native element at a speed which must astonish it; describes half of a sixty-foot circle at the same rate, and lands either in a tree or on a rock with sufficient force to break itself."

Some of the Bergen tradespeople have become keen anglers, but the notion of sport has not yet permeated all classes. We asked our excellent cook, Frederika, who for some years came from the south of Norway to minister to our needs, whether there was any salmon fishing near her home. "Oh yes," she

said, "very good fishing ; it belongs to a Norwegian gentleman." "And does he fish?" we inquired. "Oh no," she replied with dignity, "he does not fish himself; he very rich man; he pay people to fish for him."

Doubtless she considered us very foolish to labour with the rod when we might, like the Norwegian gentleman, achieve a better result by paying people to net the pools for us. Her attitude of mind was not unlike that of an American-speaking Norwegian I once met in the south of Norway. We were fishing a river near a small town and staying at the inn there. My host had an arrangement with the local fishmonger to sell to him such fish as we did not want for the inadequate sum of 4d. per pound. Sport was moderate, and the number of groats due at the week's end insignificant. The Norwegian exile was staying at the same inn, having returned to his native land to pickle mackerel for the American market. Imbued with the ideas of his adopted country and determined not to lose a chance, he made inquiries as to our proceedings, and was evidently puzzled by them. One evening he said to me, "I've been reckoning up this salmon-catching business of

yours, and darn me if I can see how you think you're going to make it pay."

Although, as I have already stated, we have never had any occasion to suspect that fish are unlawfully killed in the ladder, where they might be slaughtered wholesale, yet there is a certain amount of poaching with rod and line in the upper waters. Worms are the favourite bait. Very little is done in this way during our stay; but in August, when we are usually succeeded by friends who come to fish for that month, there is much cause for complaint. It is a curious feature that the poacher is often the actual owner of the water or his near relation. It is doubtful if many fish are killed, but it is not exactly encouraging to suspect that a bunch of worms has been run through a pool an hour before you begin to fish it with a fly.

There is some excuse for this practice in August. Years ago the English tenant never thought of fishing as late as that—and as soon as his back was turned, the natives fished at their own discretion; and if a man fishes his own water who, except his tenant, shall say him nay? But it has been discovered that a

good deal of amusement can be got out of fishing at that time, and there are numbers of Englishmen to whom it is a convenient month for a holiday.

How to deal with these poachers is something of a problem. A year or two ago, being elsewhere in Norway at the time, I received a list of the names of men who had been observed fishing in my absence. I consulted a lawyer in Bergen. He deprecated prosecution as troublesome and expensive; "I will put up a notice," he said. I suggested that it did not seem very useful to put up a notice on ten miles of water. "Oh no," he said, "I shall not put it up on the river; I shall fix it on the church-door." Whether this brought the marauders under the ban of mother church I cannot say, but there has been less cause for complaint since. Perhaps the improvement has been assisted by my notifying to the priest that I should stop subscribing to the local charities, unless his people showed more respect for my rights.

The names of these people are sometimes a puzzle to strangers. The peasants as a rule have no surnames proper. It is usual for

a man to be known by three names:—his Christian name, that of his father with the termination -sen, and that of the place at which he lives, whether he owns it or not. For instance, Ole Jacobsen Langeland signifies Ole the son of Jacob, who lives at Langeland. His son will probably be christened Jacob, and *his* full name will be Jacob Olsen Langeland. If he moves to Utvik, he will be called Jacob Olsen Utvik. If he goes to a town or to America, he probably, but not always, drops the territorial name and becomes Jacob Olsen. And then it is usual for Olsen to crystallize into a surname, and for his children to be called Olsen too. It is not so long since a similar custom prevailed in Wales. David Evans was the son of Evan Davies, and his son in turn was called by his grandfather's name. Evans and Davies are now surnames, but it was just a matter of chance which genitive form came to be adopted by the family.

There seems to be a taste for giving rather high-sounding names to girls:—Christine and Severine we have met with. The men are chiefly Anders, Jens, Simon, Knudt (Canute),

Olaf, Martin, and so on. There is a fondness for names of Latin form such as Rasmus and Modestus. There being no aristocracy in Norway, the common people are not tempted to adopt the English fashion of christening children after the family names of great houses, Talbot, Howard, Percy, and the like.

The absence of an upper class, as we understand it, has a very noticeable effect on the life and character of these peasants. The distinctions of wealth and poverty, though they exist, are trifling beside those we are accustomed to in richer countries; and the consequent equality of station accounts for much of the self-respect and independent bearing which are so marked a characteristic of the Norwegians. To them may fittingly be applied the well-known lines of Goldsmith on the Swiss:—

“Though poor the peasant’s hut, his feasts though small,  
He sees his little lot the lot of all;  
Sees no contiguous palace rear its head,  
To shame the meanness of his humble shed;  
No costly lord the sumptuous banquet deal,  
To make him loathe his vegetable meal;  
But calm, and bred in ignorance and toil,  
Each wish contracting, fits him to the soil.”



## CHAPTER IX

### GRILSE

“ Alas ! regardless of their doom,  
The little victims play ! ”

—GRAY, *A distant prospect of Eton College.*

EARLY in the season, when fresh salmon are running every tide, and the year is young and every rising fish may be a monster, grilse are regarded as a nuisance. “ It is only a grilse,” shouts your comrade in an injured tone, as his bending rod shows that he is fast in something. And apart from the dissatisfaction one may feel with the grilse for not being the hoped for “ stor lax,” he will, unless tightly held and promptly dragged ashore, be a positive disadvantage ; for he will splash all over the pool and perchance scare his betters. But in the dog-days, when the sun is bright and the water warm, and salmon are scarce and sulky, the grilse sometimes assumes an importance more nearly answering to his merits. We may then even go so far as to take out a small rod and fine tackle and angle for him of



*Samuel's Pool.*

Walter L. Bales, Jr., Sec.

## CHAPTER IX

### GRILSE

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The little victims play !"

*Grisey, A distant prospect of Eton College.*

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*Sancti Paul.*



set purpose, looking on the chance of hooking a 20-pounder as a matter to be dealt with if and when it may occur.

And in truth the grilse are one of the most important factors in our problem. With our minds set on a higher quarry we may sometimes regard their prevalence as a plague; but they are the vigorous youth of the salmon race, and with them is the future.

In the books of reference, the grilse is defined as a salmon on its first return from the sea, before it has spawned. Sceptical Mr. Willis Bund may have some fault to find with this, but it is accurate enough for practical purposes. One would have supposed that the connection between grilse and salmon was by this time sufficiently established; but I learn this year that some of the net-owners, who are trying to get the size of the mesh reduced, still maintain that they are distinct species. A hundred and fifty years ago Pontoppidan wrote:—

“The Tart, or Pinke, is a small kind of Salmon, and differs but very little from the common kind, except it be in size; for it is not as big as the Salmon when full grown.

“It is therefore considered as a particular

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kind; though by some writers it is thought to be no other than a young Salmon."

It is probable that the view that they are different fish has never died out among the more ignorant fishermen. And as an important interest can always secure its expert, the net-owners are finding some scientific support.

Compared with most Norwegian rivers, grilse run early here. There are stories of grilse in May, but I can only speak for certain of our own experience. The following are the earliest dates on which we have killed grilse:—

1898	.	.	.	.	June 10.
1899	.	.	.	.	June 8.
1900	.	.	.	.	June 20.
1901	.	.	.	.	June 3.
1902	.	.	.	.	June 9.
1903	.	.	.	.	June 4.

Of these years, 1898 and 1899 were great grilse seasons. In 1900 they were very scarce, only four in all being killed in June. The next two years there were only moderate runs; but in 1908 they have again been exceedingly numerous.

The average weight is small—over the whole series of years about 8½ lb. The great majority weigh from 8 lb. to 4 lb., but they have been

killed as small as 2 lb. and as large as 7 lb. We have had lying on the grass at the same time a salmon of 6 lb. and a grilse of 7 lb., the distinction between the two fish being unmistakable. I agree with Sir Herbert Maxwell ("Salmon and Sea Trout," p. 258) that it is often difficult to tell the difference between a small salmon and a large grilse. Indeed, many fish of 4 and 5 lb. have looked to me very much like salmon. But on the other hand there are individuals in which the accepted points of difference are very strongly marked. There can be little doubt that most of the larger grilse are killed in the fjord nets, while many of the smaller fish struggle through, and bear with them the mark of the mesh. This is a pity, as the destruction of the finest and strongest specimens of the race in their youth must tend to its deterioration. The present agitation to reduce the size of the mesh can hardly fail to aggravate this evil, and it is the interest of all English anglers in Norway to aid Herr Landmark, the fishery inspector, in his opposition to the measure, by supplying him with the details he asks for of net-markings on the grilse they kill.



Previous to 1902, when no record was kept of net-marked grilse, I was under the impression that considerably more than half the grilse killed were marked. Probably this was an error, as in 1902 out of seventy-four grilse killed in June and July only thirty-two had net-marks. In 1908 out of 119 killed, forty-five were marked. The proportion therefore seems to be roughly about 40 per cent.

It is a curious fact that for some days nearly all the grilse caught will be net-marked ; these days being preceded and followed by a period when none will have such markings. For instance, in 1908, from July 5th to 9th, seventeen grilse were killed of which not one was marked. On the 22nd and 23rd of the same month, of nine grilse seven bore markings. The explanation of a particular school of grilse being without marks may be that it has passed the most heavily-netted portion of the outer fjords during the weekly close time, or perhaps that for some reason it has come through in the deeper water away from the shores.

Major Traherne in his "Habits of the Salmon" discusses the conditions of a good

grilse year. Our short summer residence on this Norwegian river precludes us from making any useful observations on the points connected with smolts which he raises. We are more interested in the questions discussed by Mr. Willis Bund in "Salmon Problems" as to the connection, if any, between the run of grilse and "gillings," the term used by Severn fishermen for the smaller salmon presumably representing the next stage in a salmon's life. Whatever may be the case in rivers of the British Isles, where fish run in every month of the year, there can, I think, be little question that here the small salmon up to, say, 12 lb. in weight are the survivors of the grilse of the previous year. My statistics do not extend over a sufficiently long period of years to be in any way conclusive, but such as they are, they are very significant:—

GRILSE		SALMON
		Number killed up to and including 12 lb. weight.
1898. Very numerous	. (176)	—
1899. Very numerous	. (157)	123
1900. Scarce . . .	. (61)	101
1901. Moderately numerous	(107)	34
1902. Scarce . . .	. (72)	51
1903. Very numerous	. (119)	35

The figures within brackets are the numbers of grilse killed. They do not altogether represent the strength of the run, as the extent to which grilse have been fished for has varied in different seasons. For example, in this year, 1903, grilse have been in great abundance, and it would have been, I think, easy to rival the records of 1898 and 1899. It is probable that in the poor years the proportion of grilse killed to grilse running has been larger than in the prolific years.

It will be remarked that the great grilse runs of 1898 and 1899 were followed by great captures of "gillings" in 1899 and 1900; and that the scarcity of grilse in 1900 preceded a great fall in the number of "gillings" in 1901. The other figures point, less markedly, in the same direction. It will be particularly interesting to observe in 1904 whether, after the present good grilse season, the "gillings" again approach the high-water mark of 1899.

As regards fish of 18 lb. and upwards, there has been comparatively slight variation in the numbers killed from year to year. They belong, as I believe, for the most part to an older generation, and are affected as such by

so many other circumstances that they do not touch the considerations advanced above.

Late in July, when the nights are growing dark, great sport may sometimes be had with grilse by fishing about midnight from either shore of the tidal water, especially if the angler takes a trout rod and tackle. It is wonderful what a big fish a grilse becomes on a single-handed rod. And sometimes a sea trout of 5 or 6 lb. will join in the fray. After dark grilse, and indeed salmon, lie much closer to the banks and in shallower water than in broad daylight.

In the upper waters we always kill relatively less grilse, compared with salmon, than below the Fos. Probably they lie less in the regular salmon pools than in the long and rather shallow streams which we seldom fish. I have often thought that if this water were attached to a Scotch hotel, and flogged as such waters are, fish would be killed in all sorts of places which are now never tried.

Grilse, though very free risers when they are rising at all, are subject at times to the influences—atmospheric, or whatever they may be—which prevent salmon from coming to the

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fly. There are days when they are jumping all round one, but will look at nothing. When they do take, they are not particular as to size and pattern. They will, I think, take a larger fly than a salmon, and a smaller. They are certainly less "touchy." A salmon that has risen at the fly, and felt the hook, will rarely come again. A grilse (as Renan said of the prophet Habakkuk) is *capable de tout*. He will "pull" the hook again and again and take it in the end. His appetite (or is it his curiosity?) has a keen edge; and so he sometimes affords us sport, and he is always capital eating; but one never quite gets rid of the feeling that it is a pity to kill him.

## CHAPTER X

### TROUT

“Friends of my youth, where are they?”

—*From the Arabic.*

WHEN the salmon first ascended by means of the ladder to the hitherto salmonless waters, the surprise and, we may imagine, the indignation of the original inhabitants, the common river trout, must have been great. And with the salmon came even worse marauders, the active and irrepressible sea trout, who less troubled than the salmon by a disordered digestion and less impeded by a corpulent frame, swallowed greedily such meagre food as the river afforded, and must have worried the poor *Fario* to distraction. But time brought consolation and revenge. The protective wall of the Fos abolished, and a free trade regime established, the new-comers commenced at once to deposit myriads of ova, from which sprang countless little fishes. The brown trout saw his opportunity; he wel-

comed this introduction of cheap and nourishing food, and his active and lanky frame and occasionally protruding lower jaw show that he has been engaged in snapping it up ever since.

From the point of view of a preserver of salmon, trout are undeniably vermin. The havoc wrought by them in the spawning season is great, and the toll they levy on the parr is unending. They are fairly numerous in all parts of this river, but especially in the smooth stretch above Second Fos. If one trolls up that piece of water on a breezy day, one is pretty sure to get a dozen fish, averaging nearly a pound. The largest I have seen weighed 3 lb., and took a salmon fly in the pool below Alvaer Fos. It is curious that in some pools they will come at the salmon fly much more often than in others, and a great nuisance they are. This is particularly the case in Aamot's Pool; and many a time I have felt a "pull," and given the "moderate stroak" which old Franck enjoins, only to find to my disgust that I must haul out a thin unlovely 2-lb. trout. In the stomach of such a fish, weighing, to be accurate, 1½ lb.,

my brother found a round pebble about three inches in circumference, and weighing one ounce. This must have been a troublesome mouthful to get down.

The trout in these snow-fed waters of Western Norway are usually poor specimens of the race. Far other are their cousins in the forest lakes and rivers on the Swedish side. Over twenty years ago I spent many summers roaming about Norway in search of trout-fishing. The best I found was in the neighbourhood of the great Faemund Sö, a lake forty miles long, lying between the Christiania-Trondhjem railway and the Swedish frontier. There were grayling too, running up to 8 lb. weight. But fishing there had its disadvantages. The flies that fattened the fish drove the angler mad. It was then a difficult country to get about in, and accommodation was scanty. A tent, which I used, enabled one to get the best sport, but tent life in a mosquito country wants very good sport indeed to make it endurable. Now there is a road to the great lake, and a steamer runs upon it. There are more conveniences and doubtless fewer trout.

*Sic transit gloria.*



If I have spoken disrespectfully of the trout as "vermin," it is from no lack of appreciation of their merits—in their proper place, and under suitable conditions. These lanky hungry pirates of the western salmon rivers are no credit to their kind. It is not only among the forests of the Eastern frontier that fine well-fed specimens are to be found. In the lakes of the great central mountain mass, the Jotunfjeld, a splendid race of trout, silvery, pink-fleshed, more like salmon than trout, are to be killed, or were, twenty years ago. Some of these lakes are at as great an altitude as 4000 feet above the sea, and are girt by glittering snow peaks. The scene of the adventures of the "Three in Norway" is laid among these surroundings, and on these waters. My visits to that glorious region were made at about the same period as theirs; now, from what I can learn, trout have diminished as travellers have increased. Again in the wilds of Thelemarken, and on the borders of that great waste, the Hardanger Vidde, I have killed in lake and river a sufficiency of fine yellow trout, free risers, game to the death, fit for a king's table. Probably good sport



Walter L. Smith, D. D.

*St. Front Lake.*



may still be had there ; but the angler must be content to turn his back on the road and its comforts, to live laborious days, and not to be too critical of his night's lodging.

The inhabitants of that remote region were not all as unsophisticated as the trout. On the shore of a lonely mountain lake we found a solitary man living in a hut. A boat lay on the strand below, and a mile off, where the river left the lake, was a tempting island, evidently designed by nature for an angler's camp. We approached him with a request for the loan of the boat, for leave to pitch our tent upon the island, and for permission to fish. He was not enthusiastic, but, after some hours' thought, gave an apparently grudging assent to our proposals, in consideration of a payment of four krone (four and sixpence) a day. We stayed there a fortnight, and it was not until we had crossed a mountain pass that we learnt from another Norwegian, that neither the boat, nor the island, nor the fishing, were the property of our friend. However, we were pleased with our sport, and he, I presume, with his windfall of krone.

And for our part we should have been hard

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to please if we had not been satisfied with our fishing. As often happens in Norway, the exit of the river from the lake—that particular spot where it had almost ceased to be a lake, and had hardly yet begun to be a river—was alive with fish. It is quality rather than quantity that the trout-fisher wants. Almost every lake or stream in the country will afford an abundance of fingerlings, but you soon tire of filling your creel with fish that give you no trouble to kill, and are little good to you when killed. If you can find running water, not a lake, in which are trout averaging nearly a pound, with an occasional monster, you are in luck's way. And such were the trout here. It was a stiff climb down the rocks by the side of the river, but every rocky pool would yield a trout to the fly, and a dozen or two of such fish make a good day's sport. Neither here, nor in any other river did we kill with the fly a trout weighing more than a few ounces over 8 lb. ; those who care to use a minnow may get larger fish. Once in a river over the Swedish border, a big trout seized a small grayling which had taken my companion's fly, and as he allowed himself to be dragged almost to the shore without letting go, I just

succeeded in getting the landing-net under him in time. He weighed  $4\frac{1}{2}$  lb., and I have never seen a finer fish, and never captured another in such singular fashion.

Those who are young and enterprising and vigorous, will get more fun out of such wanderings than from the more settled and regular pursuit of salmon. The quest of the trouts' habitat will give them almost as much amusement as their capture when it is found; the dreary months spent away from Norway will be enlivened by a continual study of the map, and a calculation of altitudes and routes; and the secret of the Elysium, when it is discovered, will be jealously guarded as a precious possession.

July is quite early enough for such excursions on the high fells. In June the trout are still in poor condition, and the snow may still cause difficulty in getting about. Even in July it can be very cold of nights at an altitude of three or four thousand feet. August is sometimes a good month in the higher regions, but the northern summer is already beginning to wane, and the northern night has lost its characteristic charm.

Even a quarter of a century ago, to get good

trout-fishing it was necessary to shun the haunts of man. And with the increase of hotels, and of tourists to be fed, the trout were netted and "ottered" till in some waters they were well-nigh exterminated. Happily for the tourist angler who does not wish to rough it, this is now bringing its own cure. The innkeepers finding in the trout fisher a mine worth working, are taking up lakes and preserving them for fly-fishing only, making a regular charge for the right of fishing and the use of boats. This is sensible and business-like, but the old romance is dead.

In the tidal water here we frequently kill small brown trout. Probably they have been washed over the fall, and it has not occurred to them to use the ladder to return. They do not seem to grow to any size there. In some rivers very large brown trout haunt the brackish water at the mouth, and I have killed fairly good brown trout at the foot of a sheer fall falling direct into a fjord. In the tidal water below the fall at the mouth of that fine Irish river, the Erne, enormous brown trout are killed. They are said to live chiefly on the elvers which ascend to the river in the summer months.

Of sea trout we have no great run here, nor are they of any considerable size. I think 7 lb. is the greatest weight we have recorded. Lars was of opinion that there were less than there used to be, and I hope he may have been right. I have heard of more than one Norwegian river where a falling off of sea trout has been followed by a great increase of salmon.

The run of sea trout is nothing like as regular as that of salmon, and varies very much in different years. I fancy that in some seasons they come here, and in others ascend one of the minor rivers which enter the fjord between Osen and the sea. From observation in Norway and elsewhere, I believe that sea trout prefer a river which gives them access to a lake within a few miles of the tideway. In some of the rivers of the great Sogne-fjord, the fjord immediately to the south of ours, very heavy sea trout run in July and August, a 20-pounder being by no means uncommon. Whether they are all the true *Salmo Trutta* I do not know. No such fish are to be found here.

Sea trout fishing has been much extolled in angling books, but it is of course inferior to salmon fishing, and in the opinion of many to



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good brown-trout fishing in a river. Yet your sea trout is an attractive fish ; a bold riser when in the mood ; a dashing fighter when hooked ; often indeed in his reckless leaps and rushes seeming to be more in the air than in the water ; and when fresh-run a splendid vision of silvery sleekness. When a run is on, fish for him an hour after sunset with a light rod and fine tackle, and you will not regret having for once deserted his nobler kinsman.

Otters are said to abound in the valley, but I have never seen one. It is possible that they do some good in thinning out the trout, but they must also do a great deal of mischief among the salmon in the spawning season.

“Would you preserve a numerous finny race ?  
Let your fierce dogs the ravenous otter chase ;  
The amphibious monster ranges all the shores,  
Darts through the waves and every haunt explores ;  
Or let the gin his roving steps betray  
And save from hostile jaws the scaly prey.”<sup>1</sup>

In the absence of a pack of otter hounds, it has been suggested to me to offer a reward for each otter captured. But such measures often have an unexpected result. Years ago the

<sup>1</sup> John Gay, *Rural Sports*, Canto 1.

Norwegian Government paid a reward of two krone for every pair of eagles' claws, eagles being very destructive to the sheep on the hills. In a remote valley a farmer took me with much pride to see a barn full of young eagles which he was rearing to maturity with a view to turning an honest penny. Presumably the Norwegian Government, though strongly Protectionist, had not intended to encourage home industries to this extent. In the same way I have heard that the ingenious Hindoo took to breeding wolves when the British Government set a price on their heads.

Far more troublesome than otters here are seals, great enemies of both net fishermen and anglers. It is said that a single seal has been known to empty a net of its contents in a night. They are sometimes numerous in the fjord, and no doubt they not only kill many fish, but scare those which are travelling to the river. But when they are emboldened actually to come up into the river itself the results are simply disastrous. What becomes of the salmon I cannot say, but they neither take nor show. I was standing one day on a rock close to the entrance of the fish-ladder, when a seal put his

head out of the water within three yards of me. I was not expecting to see a seal, and he was not expecting to see me, and I cannot say which was the more startled. He had certainly taken up a strategic position, with a view to cutting off fish that were making for the ladder. I have seen a seal's head emerge from the water a few yards below my companion's fly. It is needless to say that the angler had no sport. The only consolation is that when we see seals, it means as a rule that a big shoal of fish is running, and that when we have scared the seals away, our turn will come.

## CHAPTER XI

### FLIES

"O, what a tangled web we weave  
When first we practise to deceive."

—SCOTT, *Marmion*.

OF flies and flymaking there is no end. Not only has every important river in the British Isles developed its own type, but these types have been intermingled and modified, to the infinite advantage of tackle-makers and the confusion of honest anglers. Recently a gallant attempt has been made by Mr. Baden-Powell in the opposite direction, and we are presented with half-a-dozen patterns, in which the advantages of all known flies are combined, a series of pocket epitomes of the whole art of fly-tying. When this process is fully developed, we shall no longer be troubled to change our Jock Scot for a Silver Doctor; the salient features of each will be offered to the fish, combined chemically in a tabloid form.

The conditions of Norwegian salmon fishing

have prevented the growth of a variety of local patterns such as Scotland and Ireland are plagued with. The English angler has brought with him, as a rule, examples of certain well-known and standard patterns, and his Norwegian attendant has accepted them with stolid indifference as a natural part of the Englishman's wonderful outfit. If I showed a fly to Lars, and asked his opinion of it, he would wait until he had carefully felt the point of the hook with his thumb, and if he found it sharp, would pronounce the fly good enough. And here, I believe, he hit on a great truth, often forgotten by our local practitioners, that the quality of the iron is of greater importance than the fur and feathers with which it is decked. Better a rough fur body and a simple turkey wing on a good wire with a firmly-tied loop, than the finest creation of silks and toppings on a badly-tempered hook and a loop that draws.

And so it happens, that in Norway most anglers use but few patterns, and those chiefly the well-tried "standards." The Jock Scot and its derivatives; the Rangers, Durham and Black; the Doctors, Black, Silver and Blue; if to these we add the Black Dose, the Benchill,

and the Dusty Miller, we shall have enumerated the chief contents of the angler's book. The man who ties his own flies will naturally go further afield; to a greater or less extent as his temperament is imitative or creative.

The main rules for these clear-water snow-fed rivers I take to be as follows:—in bright sun a silverbodied fly with (say) a Blue Doctor as a change; on a dark day a Jock Scot; on a clear night a Black Doctor; on a cloudy night the most striking pattern you can find, say a Durham Ranger. I give these merely as types which I have personally found successful in the given circumstances. They are capable of almost infinite variation. I have yet to experience the conditions in which the Jock Scot will not kill. A variety of it, the Blue Jock Scot, has this year proved eminently successful in bright weather.

A few of Mr. Kelson's sun-flies and other "startlers" may be useful for fish that are wearied with the sight of the ordinary lures. Something may sometimes be done by a startling change of size. It has happened to me to fish Second Fos in dead-low water late in July with tiny flies without avail, and then as the

shades of night were closing in to put up a 4/0 Black Doctor, and quickly hook my fish.

It is this question of size on which the angler's success chiefly depends. On our tidal water we have exceptional opportunities of observing the effect of different sizes, in varying heights of water and changing conditions of light. Within the twenty-four hours we have killed fish on such widely differing hooks as a No. 2 Silver Grey, and a 7/0 Durham Ranger. The last is an extreme instance, but in the rough water at the head of Lervik Pool, in a big river, on an unusually dark night, it has often done its work.

Whether fish are colour-blind, as some assert, or not, these Norwegian salmon certainly do not seem to have any decided preferences in that respect. If there is a choice, perhaps red is the colour most appreciated; a view which runs counter to the story told by old Pontoppidan of a fisherman in this district of Söndfjord :—" They say the Salmon has a great aversion to any thing red ; so that the fishermen that watch this fish, must never wear red jackets nor caps of that colour : a certain person here in Sundfjord for that reason took

all the red tiles off from the top of his house, which is just by the water-side, and covered it with blue ones." So do we change claret fur for blue silk, perhaps with equal reason.

On the whole, we have invariably found that the Black Doctor or the Black Dose, or a fly of similar darkness, is unsurpassed in that twilight between sunset and dawn which we call night in Norway. As a fly-tier I naturally prefer my own variety, which is as follows :—

**TAG.**—Silver twist, and yellow silk.

**TAIL.**—A topping, Teal and Chatterer.

**BODY.**—Two-thirds black silk; followed by one-third scarlet seal's fur. Oval silver tinsel ribs.

**HACKLE.**—A natural black hackle up the body; gallina at throat.

**WINGS.**—Two tippets, back to back, veiled with Teal, Gold Pheasant tail, Peacock herl and Mallard. A topping over all.

**HORNS.**—Blue Macaw.

**CHEEKS.**—Light blue Chatterer.

I omit Jungle Cock in the wings, because I think that in this clear water, unless it be on a very dark night, or in a very big river, it is of doubtful advantage. I attach much importance to the Chatterer cheeks. Except the topping, nothing has such a lifelike gleam



in the water. With regard to tippets for wings, I have some black and white, instead of the ordinary red and white, from (I think) a cross between Reeve's Pheasant and the Silver Pheasant, which I owe to the kindness of a friend. These I find very useful.

There are few of the accessories of angling from which more pleasure may be got than the practice of tying one's own flies. Not only is the satisfaction of luring a fish thereby vastly increased; but one is never subjected to the annoyance of running short of the particular pattern or size, which the fish are believed to be taking. In the bright days of July, when it is better to wait till the sun is off the water before disturbing it, time often hangs heavy on the angler's hands; if he is a fly-tier, never. There is always some job to be done; if not a new and striking creation to be worked out, destined to eclipse all predecessors, at least an old fly to be fitted with a new tail. Tying flies is a very easy art to acquire up to a certain point; to excel needs some practice and a certain neatness of finger. Many are deterred by a belief that an immense outfit of materials is necessary.

This idea has been fostered by writers for centuries.

“To frame the little animal, provide  
All the gay hues that wait on female pride,  
Let Nature guide thee ; sometimes golden wire  
The shining bellies of the fly require ;  
The peacock plumes thy tackle must not fail,  
Nor the dear purchase of the sable's tail,  
Each gaudy bird some slender tribute brings,  
And lends the growing insect proper wings ;  
Silks of all colours must their aid impart,  
And every fur promote the fisher's art.  
So the gay lady, with expensive care,  
Borrows the pride of land, of sea, and air ;  
Furs, pearls and plumes, the glittering thing displays,  
Dazzles our eyes, and easy hearts betrays.”<sup>1</sup>

In fact the materials required for a beginner are of the simplest. A sovereign or two will purchase all the silks, furs, tinsels and feathers that are necessary. Others are acquired as time goes on. A discarded fly will often yield a topping to give sheen to a new one. The poultry yard will make its contribution ; friends will send their offerings, and in time the collection of feathers so acquired will have a special value in its owner's eyes. Like fishing, fly-tying cannot perhaps be learnt wholly from books ; a lesson or two from a fly-tying

<sup>1</sup> John Gay, *Rural Sports*, Canto 1.

friend, or from a professional to begin with, and then the books become of value.

To Walton or to his detractor Franck<sup>1</sup> the fly-tier will hardly go for practical instruction. Of all the successors of these worthies, I know only one from whom the art may be acquired with ease and certainty. Captain Hale's "How to Tie Salmon Flies" (London, 1892) is a marvel of lucidity and thoroughness. It is rare to find a writer with such a gift of giving practical directions in such a plain and intelligible manner. The illustrations, in which every stage of the process is depicted, are as good as the text. For my part, I gratefully acknowledge that whatever facility I have acquired in tying flies is mainly due to this excellent manual. Unfortunately for future generations the book is out of print, and difficult to procure.

Mr. Kelson's book, "The Salmon Fly," is useful to the fly-tier for its large collection of

<sup>1</sup> "Northern Memoirs, calculated for the Meridian of Scotland, writ in the year 1658 by Richard Franck, Philanthropus." A scarce book, of which a new edition, said to have been edited by Sir Walter Scott, was published in 1821. The verbose pedantry of Franck makes it almost impossible to read him, but he undoubtedly understood the practice of salmon-fishing with the fly, and it is amusing to dip into the book.

patterns, and its excellent plates. But its instructions in fly-making lack the lucidity of Captain Hale. Sir Herbert Maxwell's delightful "Salmon and Sea-trout," the only blot on which is the reproduction of crude illustrations of tackle from tackle-makers' catalogues, contains some useful hints. If the angler is curious as to the local patterns of British and Irish rivers, he will find them set forth by the late Mr. Francis Francis in "A Book on Angling" (London, 1867, and later editions), more fully than elsewhere.

But from whatever source instruction may best be drawn, I would say to the angler in Norway, "Do not on any account omit to learn how to tie a fly, if you feel that you have the slightest aptitude. The practice will stand you in good stead, if only for repairs, and it will save you from the boredom which sometimes besets the unemployed in the long hours when fishing is out of the question. And do not be deterred by the fear that you will never be able to rival the neat productions of the professional. The fish will like your rough flies quite as well, and when you have of set purpose changed the hackle of a standard pattern, or modified the wing, and with the result brought to bank the

long-hoped-for 40-pounder, great will be your satisfaction and your lawful pride."

A word as to hooks. Whether the angler uses eyed-hooks, as recommended by Captain Hale, or hooks with gut loops attached, must be left to his individual preference and judgment. I think the gut loops are pleasanter to attach to the cast, but the metal eyes last for ever. It is a dreadful catastrophe for the loop of a fly to draw from the hook, and this has been known to occur in the case of old flies, the tying silk and varnish having perished. The ordinary Limerick hook, now almost universally used for salmon flies, frequently has the point too much turned in. My attention was called by a letter in the *Field* a few months ago, to a type of hook with a point not parallel to the shank, but turned somewhat away from it. The writer claimed that of fish hooked he lost a far smaller proportion than with ordinary hooks. As I had previously had an idea that some such change would be beneficial, I gave the hooks an extended trial this year, and can thoroughly corroborate the claims made for them by the writer in the *Field*. Of fish that rose to the fly, I certainly hooked quite as large a proportion as


usual, and of fish that were hooked, I scarcely lost one. These are known as Major Fraser's hooks, and they are to be obtained of Messrs. Farlow & Co.

Improvements in fishing tackle have been done to death in recent years, and it is doubtful whether there is so great an improvement after all. Certainly one of the many charms of salmon fishing with the fly is that you want so little in the way of apparatus. Your rod and reel, your line and cast, your box of flies;—with less you cannot do; more is superfluity. It is when you come to the baser arts, to the use of prawn and gudgeon, that the day of queerly twisting reels, of cunning swivels, and complicated tackles, begins. But there is one modern invention which I consider of great advantage to the fly fisherman—Mr. Kelson's lever winch. To be able to alter the check of your winch when playing a fish is often very useful, and a little practice leads you to play a fish in this manner as a matter of course. These reels are made of a light alloy of aluminium, and you can therefore use one which has a very big drum, with only a moderately heavy rod.

Given your tackle and your flies, the proper use of them can only be acquired by practice at the water-side. When you have attained to a certain proficiency, the instructions of the books may give a finish to your style. The main principle of fishing the fly is to cast well down and across the stream, and to keep your line as straight as possible from the fly to the point of the rod. Then as it takes its zigzag course across the pool, every fibre of the fly will spread out and close again over the body—it will be a creature endowed with life. But even more important than this, is to get over your fish. Your attendant will generally indicate their position; but with an untrained Norwegian you will sometimes have the additional pleasure of finding it out for yourself. If they are lying too far out to reach in the orthodox diagonal way, cast straight across the river to them. The stream will snatch your line, and make a big curve of it; your fly will follow head-down stream, a shapeless, inert mass; but perchance a fish will follow it out of curiosity until the moment when, the line straightening, it has taken the semblance of a living thing, and then will





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seize it. I remember hearing a critic say, "I can't think how Claude gets all those fish. He throws his line across the river; it goes round all in a heap, and when it straightens there is a fish at the end." Claude knew what he was about.

Norway is not always a good school for anglers. A novice will often learn much more by taking a rod on a well-fished river at home, where he will probably be able to watch first-rate performers, and where his gillie will be an expert. Here he may have to puzzle out many problems for himself. Often he will get little information from the ignorant or uncommunicative Norwegian, and there is the barrier of an unknown tongue.

But to the angler who has learnt his craft, and is not in a hurry, this is an unmitigated advantage. He will be his own master, and not the mere creature of a tyrannical servant. The tendency of all sport is to exalt the influence of the professional; but in this unsophisticated country we may still select our own flies, and fish them when and where we think best.

## CHAPTER XII

### NORWEGIAN FISHING, OLD AND NEW

“ We were the first that ever burst  
Into that silent sea.”

—COLERIDGE, *The Ancient Mariner*.

THE fisherman who is also bookish (and since the time of Izaak Walton your angler has ever been held to have at least a nodding acquaintance with Literature), will turn with interest to those books which give any account of the adventures of the early pioneers of salmon fishing in Norway. The printed records of their sport are few ; and it would interest many of the present generation if the owners of any old fishing diaries would publish the pith of them in the *Field* or elsewhere.

The first English anglers of whom there is any record visited Norway seventy or eighty years ago. These early adventurers must have had something of the Elizabethan heroes in their blood. An expedition nowadays to fish the great African lakes would be a less arduous

undertaking than was then a journey to the Namsen, their Mecca. We read of occasional merchant ships sailing for Norwegian ports; but the more certain route was by "commodious and powerful steam packets to Hamburg"; whence the traveller had before him a long and toilsome journey by road or coasting steamer through Denmark and Sweden to Christiania and thence to Trondhjem.

The earliest book with which I am acquainted, in which may be found any considerable account of salmon fishing in Norway is Belton's "Two Summers in Norway" (London, 1840). In 1837 the author reached Mediaa on the Namsen on the 14th July. According to his account, the river had been unknown to anglers, "until about seven or eight years ago, a couple of Irishmen, who had heard of the fame of the Namsen, penetrated to Fiskum Fos; of which they brought back such a report, that many have been induced to follow their steps." But in 1837, until his arrival, not a single angler had been heard of. He gives an interesting account of the river, and regrets that such a big water can only be fished by harling. "This is doubtless a very killing

method; for if the boat be well managed, the fly can be presented in the most tempting manner to almost every salmon in the river. But on the other hand, it reduces the inexperienced Tyro, and the accomplished Angler, nearly to the same level . . . the hooking a fish depends at least as much upon the boatmen, as the fisherman. This is the great defect of the Namsen, as an angling river." Fishing thirty-one days, he caught 106 salmon and grilse, which together weighed 1558 pounds.

In 1839 Belton returned to Norway. He crossed the Fille-fjeld to Laerdalsören, and unsuccessfully tried the Laerdal River. In the light of the reputation that river has deservedly acquired, it is delightful to read his verdict: "I saw enough to convince me there never can be good angling here, as the bed is too shallow, and the stream too rapid, for salmon to remain long in any of the lower pools." On his arrival at the Namsen he was distressed to find that he was not to have the river to himself, but was obliged to share it with three other English anglers. Also he was annoyed by native "interlopers," many of the peasants having taken to the sport. He had an erroneous idea that

fishing was perfectly unrestricted throughout Norway, and that if he gave half the fish killed to the riparian owners, he was doing a gracious act; and he seems to have been astonished at the rapacity of some of the landowners who did not welcome him on these terms. Little did he foresee the conditions under which his successors fish to-day. This year in thirty-three days fishing he killed 147 salmon and grilse, and nine white trout, together amounting to 1772 pounds.

On leaving the Namsen, Belton visited some of the rivers south of Trondhjem: but it was now September, and his judgment on the Orkla (one of the best rivers in Norway to-day), that it "is not worthy of retaining an angler for even a day from better streams" was given on insufficient grounds. In the Rauma he killed a fish of 21 lb. He describes the river as much netted and full of traps. His remarks on other rivers are mostly at second-hand, and of no great importance, but his book generally is of interest and value as a picture of sport and travel in Norway sixty-five years ago.

In 1842 Mr. John Milford published "Norway,



and her Laplanders, in 1841 ; with a few hints to the Salmon Fisher." The hints are not valuable. He refers the reader to Mr. Belton's volumes, which, however, he fears "by expatiating on the merits of Norway, its facilities, and unexampled sport, have peopled the once lonely river banks with our erratic countrymen." His views of the future are very pessimistic : — "The fishing will every day diminish ; the *feræ naturæ* of course recede before civilisation ; man is doomed to be their master and destroyer. The Norwegians, who are excellent in copying, although slow in invention, have already begun to imitate those processes which the English angler has taught them." They now construct rude flies ; and if they cannot "kill many fish, either by their aid, or by that of the worm or the net, they nevertheless by constantly troubling and worrying the waters, drive the salmon away, make them shy, and spoil the sport of the scientific professor, who has come more than a thousand weary miles only to find himself anticipated by those who, like the heron, live on the river bank, and never miss an opportunity."

Like Mr. Belton, Mr. Milford seems to have

believed that the earth was designed for the amusement of Englishmen.

In 1848 appeared "Jones's Guide to Norway and Salmon Fisher's Pocket Companion." Jones was a tackle maker in Jermyn Street, and dedicates the book to one of his customers, Sir Hyde Parker. The Namsen is still "the king of salmon rivers," and the rivers of the Bergen and Stavanger districts are still ignored; but particulars are given of the Rauma, the Sundal, the Orkla, the Gula, and other rivers. In the last chapter the angler is taken to the Far North, to the Alten, the Reisen, and the Tana. The publication of such a book shows to what an extent the vogue of Norwegian fishing had increased in the few years following the issue of Belton's work. It is a difficult book to procure nowadays; but with its naïve style, and its excellent coloured plates of flies, it is an attractive little volume.

In his "Scandinavian Adventures" (London, 1854), Mr. L. Lloyd was at pains to collect the experiences of various anglers, such as Sir Hyde Parker, Sir Charles Blois, Mr. Dann, Mr. Fosbrooke, and others, chiefly in the period between 1840 and 1850. There is little in

these records which would appear remarkable to-day. But the note of pessimism is present. Sir Hyde Parker, one of the best known of the early anglers, and the captor of a 60-pound fish in the Namsen, writes: "In Norway every man is now a fisherman, and many of the waters are hired, so that it is difficult to get a cast to yourself; and I consider the game nearly up, at least for an old one like myself, and not worth going the distance. There are few flogging rivers, all dragging, which levels all, and skill avails nothing."

Lloyd's "Scandinavian Adventures" is a mine of information on all matters connected with Northern sport and natural history; few better books are to be found on the sportsman's shelves.

We have seen that already—before 1850—the best waters were beginning to be rented for the exclusive use of anglers. This was not always an easy business to arrange. The land being held in small parcels by peasant proprietors, it was sometimes necessary, in order to obtain an extensive right, to come to terms with thirty or forty individuals. But the lease once settled, the angler's position was secure;

and there was an honourable understanding that one Englishman should not interfere with another already in possession.

A generation later, when I first knew Norway, this was the prevailing system. It may almost be described as a case of "one man, one river"—certainly as far as the smaller rivers were concerned. In each valley an Englishman held sway, holding the fishing rights of the choicest part of the water direct from the landowning peasantry; the upper and lower waters being more or less derelict, and trapped and netted at the owner's will. It was a system which, with the improvement of communications and the influx of other anglers, was bound to fail. At that time the townsfolk had not yet seen the advantage of combining business with pleasure, of getting their sport and making the Englishman pay for it (and a little over), which they have since grasped. But when they took up the game, they played it to the utmost. Gradually every scrap of available water was taken up by syndicates in Bergen and elsewhere. When the Englishmen's leases fell in, they found that they had to compete with

these new-comers; and being foreigners, and sportsmen rather than men of business, they were quite unable to meet effectively the methods of their rivals. The result was that many lost their water; others had to choose between losing it, or accepting the restricted terms which were offered to them, and a great deal of ill-feeling was engendered. And so the modern system of dividing rivers into beats, and letting those beats by the season, or the month, came into being.

These speculators in rivers were much assisted by the Norwegian law which provides that an alien may not acquire land without the consent of the Crown, and may not lease property for a longer period than ten years. The Norwegians have a perfect right to make such a law, but its effect has been bad for the landowners, acting as a restriction on their market, and in practice throwing them into the arms of these middlemen—not always to their advantage, as many now realise.

In the early days of this business there was doubtless much chicanery, and even downright fraud. I once rented a small river from a person

of good position in Norway, and foolishly paid the rent in advance. On my arrival at the river, I found that he was not in possession of the fishing rights of a very important part of the water, and had I not been able to come to terms with the proprietor on my own account, I should have been unable to fish there. This was not a very difficult business; and the incident was rather typical of the Norwegian peasant's character. On the first day of my visit I commenced to fish the most likely piece of water. I had hardly wetted my line before an old man toddled down from a neighbouring house, and told me to go away. I mentioned the name of the townsman to whom I had paid the rent, but the old fellow shook his head and signified that Herr —— had nothing to do with it. Happily at this moment his curiosity came to my rescue, and he inquired the cost of my rod. This matter settled, I offered him my tobacco-pouch, and while he was helping himself I made a cast. As luck would have it, I hooked a grilse, and when this was killed and presented to the old man we became fast friends. Within a week he cut down some trees to facilitate my casting, and I fished his water to our mutual

satisfaction for the rest of my stay. Whether he ever got any of the rent I do not know. It is doubtful.

In another case within my knowledge, a long stretch of river above a fos, which salmon were never able to surmount, was let to Englishmen. A ladder was projected, but not yet made. The lessor netted a few fish below, and carried them to the upper water, and on the strength of this advertised and let it as a salmon river.

But the business has become too big a one to be conducted any longer on these lines, and I have no reason to doubt that the managers of the Bergen syndicates are honestly anxious to improve the fishing and to attract customers. Certainly they have done good work in buying off traps and nets; with the result that certain waters, until recently considered useless, are now affording good sport. The rents asked are very high. A perusal of an agent's catalogue leads me to the conclusion that they are calculated on a basis of about seven and sixpence per pound killed in the best of previous seasons, and they have a decided tendency to increase.

So much for the conditions of angling; but what of the fish? The last few seasons have seen a great increase of netting in the fjords. This may partly be due to the educational effect of the Bergen Fishery Exhibition of 1898. It was visited by great numbers of excursionists from the surrounding country, and they had the opportunity of studying there the latest developments in fish-catching apparatus. Since then, several nets have been put out within two miles of the mouth of our river. It appears that they do not catch much, as it happens that they cannot be set in the direct course of running fish. It is probable that some were started in the hope that I should buy them off, as suggestions were offered me to that effect. But to do so is a hopeless business, and would only be the signal for a fresh crop. It is difficult to learn what goes on, but I am informed that one of these nets catches only fish which are returning from the river, either having broken our tackle, or having met with an injury in the Fos or the ladder. If this is true, it seems to show that fish return to the sea by a different route from that by which they come from it.



But it is in the outer fjords that the chief mischief is done. The hundreds of little islands, which guard the entrances to the main fjords, create a number of small channels, through some of which fish must pass, and wherein (to their own and our undoing) they often linger in the early days of June; and these channels are beset with nets. The net-owners, as is the way of their kind, are quite reckless of the future; their object is to kill all they can for an immediate market; some even maintain, as a cloak for their rapacity, that salmon spawn in the sea, and that it is quite unnecessary to allow any to ascend the rivers. If it were not for the freshwater anglers, chiefly English, by whom, or on whose behalf, netting and trapping in the rivers have been put a stop to, the race of salmon would be in serious danger of extermination. In many rivers hatcheries have been established, and even if their influence is exaggerated, it can scarcely but be beneficial in some degree to net-owners and sportsmen alike. But it is hard that the whole burden of protecting the race, and providing for the future, should fall on the riparian owners and their tenants.

There is a weekly close-time for nets, varying

57 in different districts. Here, in North Bergen County, it extends from 6 P.M. on Friday to 6 P.M. on Monday. At first sight this appears liberal and sufficient; but when it is remembered that the mouths of the chief rivers are distant between twenty-five and a hundred, or more, miles from the open sea, it is obvious that a fish, which has safely passed one netted reach during the close time, runs a risk of being caught further on a few days later, when the nets are fishing. And there is also reason to fear that the close-time is not strictly observed. The temptation to fish when salmon are passing is very great; the fines inflicted for a breach of the law are ridiculously small; and the methods of inspection appear to be hopelessly inadequate. I had some reason this season to suspect that all was not as it should be, and I wrote to the Lensmand, a sort of police magistrate, on the subject. He informed me that the inspector was doing his duty, and that no cases of unlawful fishing had come to light. But what can a man with a rowing boat do in the way of supervising nets scattered over hundreds of miles of coast? And there is so much money

in the nets, and so great local influence attaches to their owners, that bribery and intimidation can hardly be unknown. The Norwegian is, in small things, a very honest man. There seems, in the country at least, to be no petty thieving, and we get into the habit of leaving our possessions about in very careless fashion. But in matters of business he is very "slim," and the capture, in unlawful hours, of salmon which do not belong to any one in particular, will hardly appear to him a dishonest act. The opinion of his fellows will be for, rather than against, him; at least, so I judge from the general tone of references to the subject.

Perhaps it may come to be considered worth while for a combination of owners and lessees of river fisheries to maintain an independent staff of inspectors, provided with steam launches, and to undertake prosecutions. If the Anglo-Norwegian Fishermen's Association wishes to justify its existence, it might give its attention to the matter. I understand that the authorities raise no objection to such private inspection; that, indeed, they are will-

ing to invest the inspectors with a badge of office.

Bad as things are now, there is worse to come. The net-owners are agitating for further advantages, and it is believed that they will obtain either an abbreviated close-time, or a reduction in the legal size of the mesh. The latter would be fatal to a large proportion of the grilse which now reach the rivers, and, as I have already pointed out, would be a foolish and disastrous change.

No wonder there are not wanting pessimists to declare that the days of Norwegian fishing are numbered, and that a grant to the net-owners of either of the above-mentioned concessions will be the final blow. In bad seasons this gloomy forecast holds the field; in good, it is forgotten. And as long as there are any salmon left to fish for, the charm of Norway will draw anglers. Our fish, fresh from the bracing Arctic Seas, are the gamest and most vigorous of their kind. We enjoy the delights of spring-fishing, without suffering the rigours of a British spring. We pursue our sport in the height of summer, beneath the clear sky

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of the glorious northern night, in copious and limpid waters, amid the grandest surroundings. Add to these, that strange indescribable attraction of the north, which, if a man once feel it, will never leave him.

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